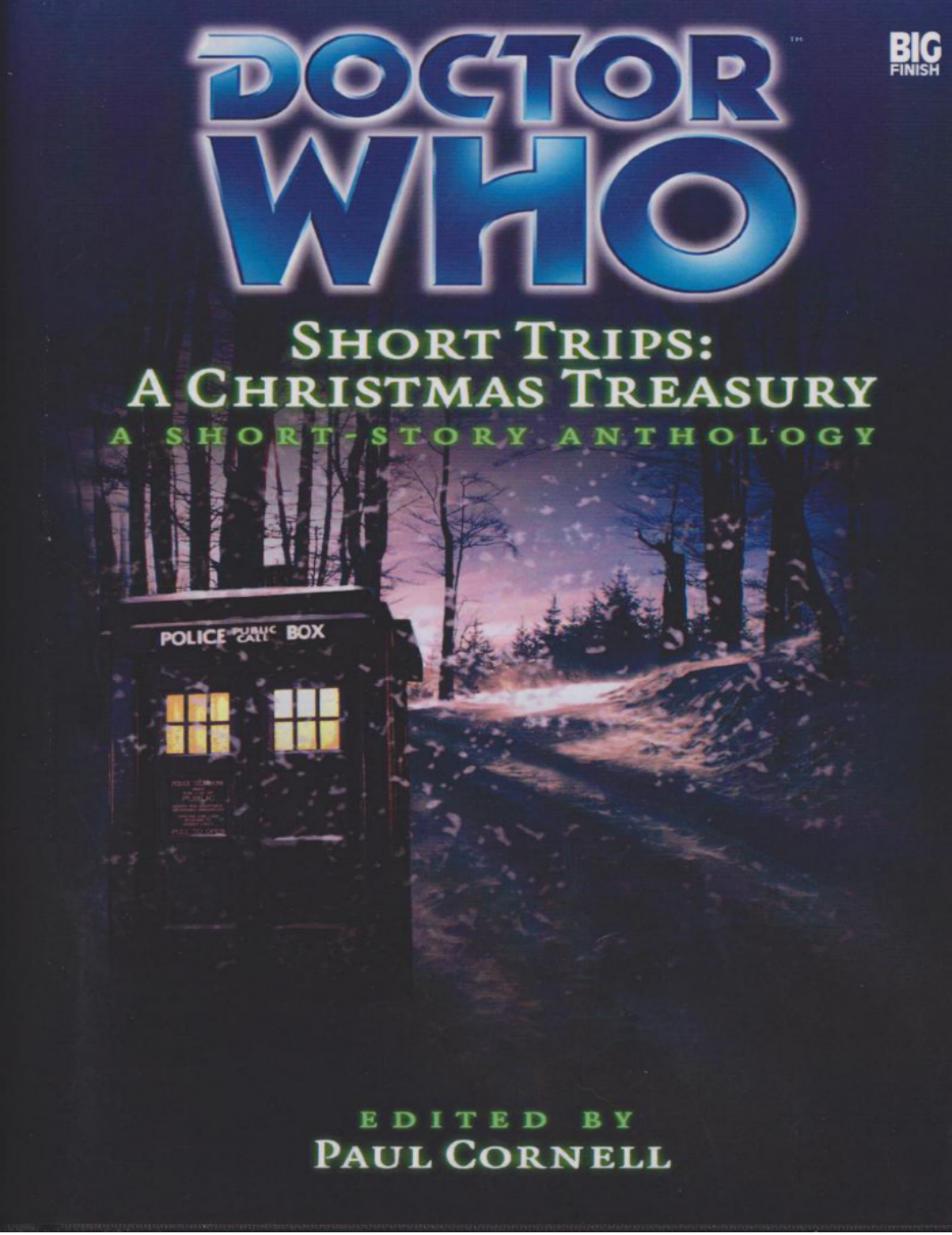
DOCTOR WHO

BIG FINISH

SHORT TRIPS: A CHRISTMAS TREASURY

A SHORT-STORY ANTHOLOGY



EDITED BY

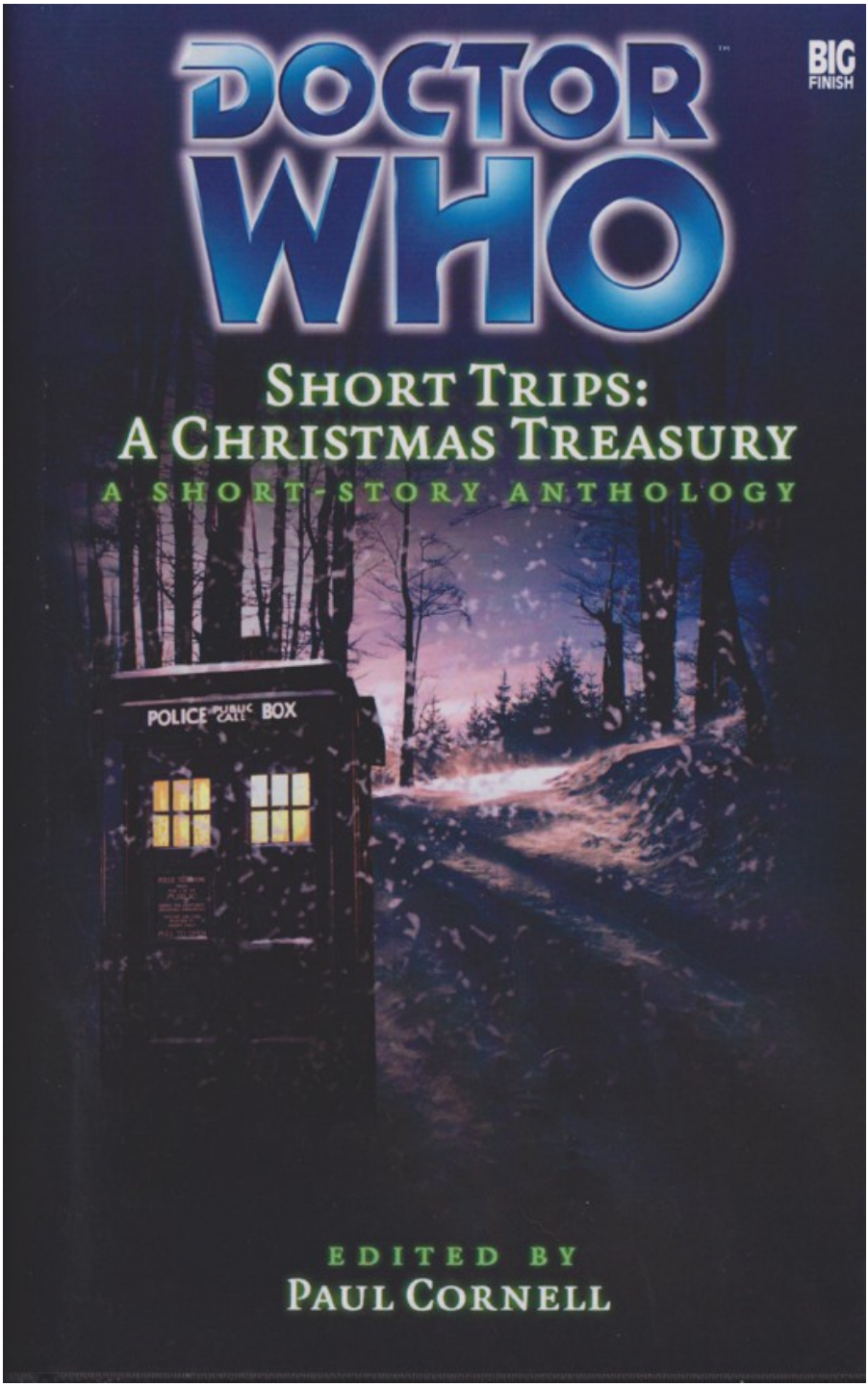
PAUL CORNELL

DOCTOR WHO

BIG FINISH

Short Trips: A Christmas Treasury

A SHORT-STORY ANTHOLOGY



EDITED BY

PAUL CORNELL

OVER THIRTY BRAND NEW ADVENTURES IN TIME AND SPACE!

SHORT TRIPS: A CHRISTMAS TREASURY

EDITED BY
PAUL CORNELL

Celebrate a *Doctor Who* Christmas with this luxury treasury of stories, poems, games and recipes for all the family.

Join the Doctor as he visits a Christmas truce in the trenches, gets caug up in an alien plot concerning the recording of *Do They Know It's Christm* and even manages last-minute shopping in Oxford Street!

From heartwarming to heartbreaking, witty pastiches to chilling ghost stories, these tales are the perfect seasonal journey into time and space.

Featuring Terrance Dicks, Lawrence Miles, Marc Platt, Jonathan Morris, Steve Lyons and many more.

ISBN 978-1-84435-112-1

9 781844 351121

UK: £14.99
Science Fiction

www.bigfinish.com

BIG FINISH

Contents

Prologue Paul Cornell

3

Last Christmas Simon Guerrier

5

UNIT Christmas Parties: First Christmas Nick Wallace

15

In the TARDIS: Christmas Day Val Douglas

23

Water's Edge Peter Adamson

25

A Yuletide Tail: Part One Dave Stone

33

Spookasem Peter Anghelides

39

Christmas Special Marc Platt

47

Never Seen Cairo Darren Sellars

63

The Man Who (Nearly) Killed Christmas Mark Michalowski

69

Last Minute Shopping Neil Perryman

79

Every Day Stephen Fewell

91

The Eight Doctors of Christmas Matthew Griffiths

105

The Little Things Paul Beardsley

109

Beep the Meep's Grundian Egg Nog &

The Brig's Brandy Butter Paul Condon

117

The Game of Rassilon Lawrence Miles

119

UNIT Christmas Parties: Christmas Truce Terrance Dicks

129

Animus, Zarbi, Menoptra Jim Sangster

139

Camilla's 0-Negative Mulled Wine & Mrs Baddeley's

Mini Christmas Pudding Truffles Paul Condon

141

The Clanging Chimes of Doom Jonathan Morris

145

On Being Five Jo Fletcher

153

Perfect Present Andy Campbell

155

Present Tense Ian Potter

163

Goodwill Toward Men J. Shaun Lyon

167

It's a Lovely Day Tomorrow Martin Day

177

All Our Christmases Steve Lyons

185

Lily Jackie Marshall

195

A Yuletide Tail: Part Two Dave Stone

203

...Be Forgot Cavan Scott & Mark Wright

205

The Feast of Seven... Eight (and Nine) Vanessa Bishop

215

UNIT Christmas Parties: Ships That Pass Karen Dunn

219

Evergreen Stephen Cole

227

Epilogue Paul Cornell

239

For Russell

Thanks for *the present*

And ho, ho, ho!

And for Mum *and* Dad

For *bread* and butter and honey

Prologue

Paul Cornell

Christmas Eve on the Wiltshire Downs. The sky is perfectly clear *as* midnight comes. And *what* comes with midnight? The point about which the year turns.

You *walk* up to the top of the hil , the stars *obscured* only by your breath. And you come to *where* you can *see* the *whole* of *the vale*

beneath you.

And you can feel it.

It's not just the expectation of mil ions of children, holding joy in because the ceremony says they *have* to. They're waiting for *an* ancient magical *being* to move through their house, incarnated as their father, *eating* the sacrifices they left. It can't be true, can it? They whisper that *between themselves* and are cynical in the day and stil *believe* in the night.

It's not just *al those* Midnight *Masses, al those lit le huddles of cars* and *people* in *the* countryside, carrying light in places *where* the dark is.

It's not just the human *urge* to make *heat* and noise in *the middle of winter,* to anticipate that the days will be long *again,* to imagine that the bonfire is the same thing as the stars.

It's that up on the bleak hil side *here,* you're feeling the connection *between* the things of soil and the things of the sky. So there's fear in looking up. *Whatever rises* out of these hills, this is its time of *year too.* It's *the same thing in* the bonfire and *the fireplace* and *the* manger.

This is *the time of big shapes* moving across the *face of the earth. Of* the shepherds *cowering* in the fields from the transcendence *above.* To be fol owed by a morning of new birth, *of silence* on the roads, of everyone crouched in their homes.

Anticipation.

Midnight is the connection between the land *and* the stars, the

warmth of life in the dead of winter, the birth of *love, the* impossibility of something that, *especially* on Christmas night, is.

So you wait, with the *silence* in the *gaps al owed* by the wind, with *the* lights on the motorways *below* getting sparse as the cars *arrive* at home to stay.

You wait *for* midnight, and inside you hear the *stories* that have circled around this moment since the thought first became flesh.

You wait and listen. .

35

Last Christmas

Simon Guerrier

It seemed like everyone else in the world was asleep. Four in the morning on Christmas Day, and the pub was dark, save for

the gaunt moonlight peeking in at the windows. Snow fell outside, undisturbed. Inside, in the almost darkness, telltale

clues told of the party had there that evening. Dirty glassware, stacked up in tall, skinny stalagmites, dominated one

end of the bar. Scraps of bright wrapping paper hid between the glasses, or elsewhere under tables, or in dark nooks and

corners. Some of the gaudy decorations had come down and been trampled under foot. Not all the ashtrays had been

cleared. The regulars had been sent home, the chairs put up on top of the tables and the place locked up. The rest could

wait until morning.

Two people were still up, in an alcove right at the back of the pub, at a table by the fire. They met here — in this pub, at this

table, this time of night — every Christmas Eve. They had done for years.

They had helped themselves to drinks, as they always did. The Doctor had a glass of tap water, Smith had his customary

pint of dark, English ale. They sat in silence, mulling, drinking, and ignoring each other. Like they always did. Willing the

other to speak first. The traditions were almost a game, one with complex and indulgent rules. Very English, thought

Smith. Very old school. He liked that.

They even wore the same clothes they always did. Smith was in his uniform, which he kept in check just for this annual

outing. His only concession to changing times was his haircut. The Doctor wore the same linen suit, or another just like

the one he'd had on that first day they met. He'd also put on I Santa Claus hat, the kind they sold on street corners for a

pound. The sort you only saw being worn by the people selling them. Last year it had been reindeer antlers. But at least

he had stopped bringing presents.

'I hate Christmas,' said Smith, levelly. A smile twitched fleetingly at the corners of the Doctor's mouth, but Smith

ignored him. 'It brings out the Worst in people,' he went on. 'It always has.'

The Brits were fighting more bitterly today, with more determination and teal, than he had ever seen before. Smith

thought it must be their disappointment showing. They had all hoped for another football match. They blamed Jerry

for not getting the day off.

Christmas meant nothing to Smith. He had never even heard of it until he Joined the army. From what little he did

know, he couldn't understand the Miss. Did they really expect to have a party here, down in the squalor and mud?

But it didn't do to say things like that. Not to them, not when they were all in the same surly mood. So Smith had spent

the day keeping himself busy and out of people's way. As a result, when the other soldiers called him over, he wondered what

jovial game they had planned. He was no stranger to bullying. The way they joked and jollied him along while their eyes

were vicious and cold didn't make him feel any better.

They had someone to meet him, they said. A relative.

Ànother Indian, you mean?' he asked, and they had all laughed at him. Smith really didn't like this one bit. But he

stepped forward into the dug-out anyway, sure he could beat whatever trial they had waiting.

His 'relative' turned out to be a Brit, one he hadn't seen before. Small, weedy-looking and not in uniform. He had on

the sort of suit they wore in India — pale, cream-coloured and cool. His straw hat was slightly askew. He wasn't covered in

muck, he was clean-shaven, and he didn't have that hangdog look that comes from persistent lack of sleep. Who was he?

Smith put out his hand to the man. 'How do you do, sir?' he said, in his best English accent. It always got a laugh.

`You must be Samarjit,' the man said, kindly, taking Smith's hand in both of his.

Smith couldn't remember the last time anyone had called him that. The Brits never usually bothered trying to

pronounce it, hence his nickname. He found himself grinning at the man, amazed.

The joke, it turned out, was that this man was a Smith, too. 'It'll probably save any confusion ifyou call me "Doctor",'

he said. He spoke quietly, directly to Smith, as if uncomfortable with the heavy-handed joshing of the others. It might have

been sympathy, if Smith hadn't known better. But then the Doctor stepped back, allowing Smith's captain to explain why

he'd been called for.

`Doctor Smith is on 6 a mission,' Captain Oakes said, gruffly.

Of course he was, thought Smith. Why else would he be here? From the looks on the other men's faces, it would have to

be a dangerous one.

Which was why they had volunteered Smith to go with him.

Ìs it because of the war?' the Doctor asked while Smith took another long swig of beer. 'Is that why this time of year

bothers you? What we saw that time...?'

'No,' said Smith. 'It just reminds me how long I've been watching them all, seeing how they ruin their lives, over and over

again.' Then he stopped.

The Doctor was smiling smugly at him. Damn him.

After all the time he had known the Doctor, known what he was capable of, Smith still fell for his childish tricks. The

Doctor had got him talking, and at the first attempt. Well, he wouldn't give him the satisfaction.

Smith gazed into the fire. The fake coal glowed white. It was no substitute for the real thing, he thought. When had

they outlawed that? He couldn't

remember. And why did they still come to this place? The Doctor had never explained. They could have gone somewhere

out of the city for a change, somewhere you could have a real fire, and maybe better beer. Perhaps, he thought, the Doctor

was bound to this one building. Maybe those were the rules. Bloody serve him right.

`Christmas is a time for putting bad things to one side,' said the Doctor. He spoke so lightly, with so little gravitas, it was

like he was talking to himself. Exactly the way to provoke Smith.

`The very worst people,' Smith snapped, 'are the ones who say

that Christmas is a time for something. It's all

about family or kindness or forgiveness. Or not being so stupid and obnoxious. Just the things they should be doing all

the year anyway!'

The Doctor said nothing.

Ìt's like Christmas is a way of compensating,' Smith went on. 'It's always the meanest ones who make a thing about it.

It makes you wonder about the people who surround their houses in thousands of lights, the ones with the life-size plastic

Santas and twelve-foot inflatable snowmen. Don't you think they beat their wives and abuse their children? What are they

making up for?'

`Christmas has been banned before,' conceded the Doctor, pulling off his Santa hat. He put it down on the table, his

fingers lingering over it. He was such a child, especially when he felt guilty. 'But it can be good for people,' he said, with a

smile. 'To have a day for their families, I mean.'

It was the wrong thing to say. They had had this argument before. Smith couldn't have a family. Because of the Doctor.

They hurried along the trenches, Smith leading. They dodged bullets and bloated rats and various bits of body. Smith

would glance back every hundred yards, just to make sure the Doctor was still behind him. He knew he shouldn't care.

You couldn't, not here. If the Doctor was wounded or killed, Smith would just go back to his regular duties.

Just once, the Doctor met his eye. The Doctor wasn't squeamish, but he had that distasteful, sour look on his face you only

kept for the first few days. You had to just accept it all if you were going to stay alive.

They reached the blocked-off part of the trench without incident.

The Doctor ran forward to investigate. The trench

had collapsed only a day or two ago, during a particularly hard shelling. A lot of men had died that night. Yet things had got

more disturbing after the barrage had stopped. Captain Oakes had sent a handful of men to report on the damage, and

none of them had Come back. A second party had been sent, and a couple of those had been hit from the German trenches.

But the survivors had found nothing of the first Search party. And Oakes had had them reassigned the moment they

reported back: so that none of the others could hear what they had seen. Rumours were rife amongst the men. Some

reckoned there were unexploded shells down

here; not that uncommon, as Smith knew only too well. Others thought there was gas or something. There were even

rumours of ghosts. The Brits were a superstitious lot.

Smith looked on while the Doctor worked, picking over the wreckage of the trench wall. It was quiet here — in the

distance there were the sounds of fighting. The British machine-gunners were staging a diversion, as Oakes had

promised. Jerry had never fallen for that kind of thing in the past, though. It would probably point them right here. Smith

had his rifle ready, whatever good that might do.

The Doctor shook 8his head, dissatisfied. What had he expected? Whatever his suspicions, he wasn't sharing them.

Without a word to Smith, he leapt nimbly up over the ruins of the trench wall, and hurried off in the direction the old

trench had led. Smith gaped. The man was in direct sight of enemy snipers.

No gunshots rang out. Smith glanced quickly across the ruined terrain of No Man's Land, but you could rarely see

anything anyway. He had no choice. Knowing in his bones he was going to die, he leapt up and sprinted after the Doctor.

Neither had said a word for nearly an hour. Smith had finished his pint, but wanted the Doctor to break the silence before

he got himself another. It would be like he was cheating otherwise. The Doctor seemed quite content gazing at the fire. In

the end, Smith could bear it no longer.

`How many times have we spent Christmas together?' he said.

The Doctor didn't even look up. Ninety-something,' he said. 'I've lost count.'

Ànd every time,' said Smith, 'you ask the same question.'

`Yes,' said the Doctor levelly, giving nothing away.

`That's all you're ever really here for, isn't it? Am I ready to move on?' Ì like to see how you are, as well.'

`The answer is still no.'

They were not out in the open long. Not a hundred yards from where the blockage started, there was a huge impact

crater. It reached fifty, sixty feet down into the ground. By the time Smith reached it, the Doctor was already scrambling

down the shallower side. There was something at the bottom. Smith didn't stop to look until he got down there. And

then he couldn't believe it.

Deep under the ground, and buried for who knew how long, was a stone building. A bit of courtyard and one wall had

been revealed, and the wall had a doorway in it. Smith stopped the Doctor from wandering straight in. They had no idea

who else might be down here, or what had happened to the other men. Smith went in first, gun ahead of him, ever so

cautiously.

Even in the gloom, Smith could see nowhere for anyone to hide. The room had an altar at the far end, but not one that

would afford any cover. There were no other exits. It might have been a chapel. Smith didn't know his Western history

well enough to guess the age of it.

The place was cold and calm, like similar buildings he knew in India. And it was incredibly quiet. He had thought the

trench quiet a moment ago, but in here you were free from the constant barrage of noise he just took for granted. All he

could hear was his own breathing. His ears were ringing in the terrible silence. It made his head ache.

He nearly had a heart attack at the sound behind him. The Doctor had lit a match. He pulled a silly, apologetic face when

Smith glared at him. Then he was off investigating.

With a bit of light, you could see that the walls were patterned with all kinds of brilliant colours. Gold leaf twinkled in the

firelight. Smith could make out people, medieval-looking people, in what he thought must be Biblical stories. Curly-bearded

men in crowns accepted gifts from what looked like dragons. Elsewhere, the dragons were ridden by children at some sort of

fete. Was that something to do with St George? When the dragons had ascended to Heaven, the kings had built a temple.

Probably this place, thought Smith.

Ìt's pretty, isn't it?' he said.

In the meagre light, the Doctor's face was grave. He traced a finger down the inscription beneath one picture. The

letters were like nothing Smith had ever seen before.

`You can read it?' he asked.

The Doctor nodded, but wouldn't say what it meant.

Smith shifted uncomfortably in his chair. His leg still gave him hell, even

DOW

The Doctor noticed.

`Don't worry about this,' said Smith. 'I don't blame you for it.'
`Not any more, at least,' said the Doctor.

Smith tutted. 'I've got used to it,' he said, crossing the troublesome leg over the other, so that he could reach the calf

and massage it. As he pummelled ad prodded away with his thumbs, he said, 'It's just ironic that a ghost can have sore

joints.'

910

Smith followed the Doctor out of the chapel and up the slope, back into No Man's Land. The return to noise was staggering,

and he found himself reeling and dizzy. Only the Doctor's voice brought him back to his senses.

r, *'Keep* up!' he called as he scurried about, dodging up and over the torn-up ugliness of the battlefield. If not for the sense of

terrible urgency in his eyes, she strange little man might have looked like a child at play as he dashed this way and that. He

was full of energy.

Smith kept careful watch, dreading the inevitable moment when Jerry spotted them.

Again they were blessed. The Doctor found what he was after before anything happened. It was a shell casing, resting

in a hollow that would give them some cover. As they hurried to it, Smith realised he had been wrong. It wasn't just a

casing, it was an unexploded shell. On his hands and knees, the Doctor darted around it twice, like a dog at a hunt, collecting

the kill. Then he crawled right up to it and without a moment's

thought started working on a panel. Smith was paralysed

with fear. He knew the life expectancy of a sapper. It was even shorter than that of a pilot. He was definitely a dead man.

Using a bit of stone lying beside him, the Doctor began tapping at the base of the shell. Every strike, though expertly

done, echoed out all around them. Smith found himself shaking. If only he had something to do. He raised his head up out

of the hollow and scanned around. Nothing. He brushed a bit of dirt from the end of his gun. He bit his lip and tried to

count to ten.

`This is what we need!' announced the Doctor, heartily. The square grey shape he held in his hand could only be one

thing: the explosive. The Doctor had also removed some wires, a detonator and other innards, and now stuffed them into

his pockets.

Then he thought again, and quickly switched things so that the detonator and explosive were in different pockets.

'Ready?' he asked.

Despite everything, there was something winningly mischievous about him, something that lived to break rules. How

did he cope in the army? `Sure,' said Smith, getting to his feet.

Which was when the bullets hit him.

Ì got a medal for it, you know,' said Smith. 'For gallantry. For what we did.' The Doctor nodded. 'We did the right

thing.'

Smith's smile had gone. 'You really don't think we could have saved more lives by not... by doing things differently?'

The Doctor shook his head. 'It wouldn't have done any good,' he said. 'It would just have caused more trouble.'

They were back in the chapel and Smith was in agony. He lay on his back in the darkness, pointing his rifle generally in the

direction of the door. He expected them any minute, sure they wouldn't be allowed to escape down here. He gritted his

teeth. Was he crying, or did he have blood all down his face?

He had been shot several times, he knew. The one just below his knee was the most painful. He had had to walk on it,

managing to help the Doctor drag the bomb parts back down here. Anything to keep his mind off the pain, he thought.

They had made a good job of it, actually, the sort of thing he might get a medal for. Posthumous ones were always a

better bit of tin.

Smith lay there, bleeding, all feeling slowly pouring out of him. The door, *the* oblong of light, warped and blurred in his

vision, and he knew he only had a short time left. If only the Doctor would leave him alone.

The Doctor hadn't been hit once. He didn't even look all that muddy. Having finished fussing over the bits of shell,

he heaved Smith up into a sitting position and forced him to drink down a cup of water. The water was sandy and smelled

funny, but Smith was so parched he gulped it down. It made him gag. There was something... wrong about it. He hadn't

seen a spring anywhere, and they couldn't be sure it was clean. But then that didn't matter, did it? He knew what his chances

were. The Doctor wouldn't meet Smith's eye.

Then the Doctor hurled the mug back into the chapel and hauled Smith to his feet. All this without a word. Unless Smith

just couldn't hear him. He realised he was fading quickly: he could hardly feel the pain now. His legs didn't want to work, so

the Doctor had to drag him forward. They struggled through the door of the chapel and across the courtyard. The Doctor then

Smith woke up in the medical wing.

yanked him up the slope, I

wt

al w

k as

in Ch

g uris

p tm

bacas

k D

w ay

ar .

d sHe could tell

and dragging the wounded man behind him. Smith could feel the water he had

because some of the nurses were wearing paper hats, and someone had drawn

drunk seeping through every part of his body. He wanted to be sick. He wanted to be left to die. He tried to say so, but the

Doctor wouldn't hear of it. Smith was feverish, but not with pain. His sight was going.

12

They were nearly at the top of the slope. The Doctor was silhouetted against the sky, still immaculate and suddenly tall. He

would be such an easy target. Weary, his consciousness fading, Smith let his eyelids close. He didn't open them when he heard

the shot, heard the Doctor cry out, just briefly, and felt him let

go. It would have been quick. Then there was heat: like Smith

was on fire, or his body was giving up and he could feel pain again. Then something raining down on him. Mud, he realised.

That was an explosion, not a gunshot. The Doctor had blown the chapel up, and now Smith was being buried alive. No, not

alive.

'I probably agree with you,' said Smith.

The Doctor tried not to look startled, but those eyebrows gave everything away.

'A couple of sips of whatever that stuff was,' Smith continued, 'and look what happened to me. The army would have loved it.

The elixir of life and they would have used it to kill more people. It was right that you blew it up.'

'It wasn't really an elixir. It had healing properties, yes —'

'I just wish you hadn't given me any of it,' Smith interrupted. 'It would have been better if I'd died in the trenches.'

pictures of Christmas trees and things and hung them above the patients' beds. A very tawdry Christmas, thought

Smith. He assumed his inability to feel his wounds was the result of whatever drugs they had given him.

Once they saw him awake, the nurses wouldn't leave him alone. He would have welcomed the attention from so many

pretty girls if they weren't so morbidly fascinated by his survival. Nobody could understand how he had lived through

the explosion, or how his wounds could have healed so suddenly. The Doctor's body had not been found. A shell blast

that size could do that to you.

Smith's survival was a miracle, they said. Such a miracle that he was back in the thick of it by New Year's Eve.

'I couldn't just leave you like that,' said the Doctor.

'But you knew what that stuff would do to me, didn't you?'

The Doctor hung his head. 'I wasn't certain,' he said, quietly. 'The place had been buried for nearly a thousand years.

Anything could have happened. It might have finished you off.'

'You took a gamble,' Smith scoffed. 'I keep asking you, but you never tell me, and now it's getting ridiculous: how did you

know what that place even was?'

The Doctor finished his water. 'I've been around a long time,' he said.

Of course he had been. Smith had not seen the Doctor drink the water, so how come he was still here a hundred years

later, and not a day older? He had his own rules, didn't he? He had probably been there when the chapel was built.

Perhaps he'd helped bury it. Maybe he was one of the people in the frescoes. In amongst the kings and dragon people,

there he would be in that same crisp white suit.

'What do you do the rest of the year?' asked Smith.

'What do I do?' asked the Doctor, thrown. He seemed, suddenly, to find his glass of water riveting.

'What did you do yesterday, or the day before that?' said Smith. 'How do you fill up the days you're not seeing me?'

'Oh, I potter about,' said the Doctor, a little too quickly. 'I see other people, places of interest. I've been to some very

good museums...'

'I don't believe you,' said Smith. He picked up the discarded Santa hat, waved it in the Doctor's direction. 'That's

what this is about, isn't it?'

The Doctor said nothing, took the hat, folded it, put it into one of his many pockets.

'You jump, somehow, don't you? From one meeting here to the next. If I don't say what you want to hear, you pop

ahead a year and try again in a different hat.'

Again, the Doctor said nothing.

'I've spent nearly a century plodding around this godforsaken world,' Smith continued, 'and I always come back here for

the same night. But you... it's

been just one long conversation, hasn't it? How much of your life have you actually lost? A day?'

'Nearly nine weeks,' said the Doctor. 'Though I have taken a bit of time off. There was an invasion, and... What do you

want me to say?'

'How about why you're even bothering?' Smith snapped. 'What do you get out of it?'

'I owed you a few hours every year,' the Doctor said, gently. 'You're right: giving you that drink was probably a mistake.

So I'm to blame for this now. All I can do is hope to make some kind of amends, help you find some peace.'

'The answer is still no, Doctor,' said Smith.

'You've changed,' said the Doctor, after a moment. 'I see it, year by year. You're calmer, controlling your anger.

Remember what it was like in the twenties? We used to have slanging matches into the morning!'

'I have every right to be angry,' Smith said, careful to keep his voice down. Still stupidly careful, after all these years. He

hadn't wanted to wake the household above them. As if he could. 'All that time in the war, and then I turn up in London to

get a medal and a glorified cold strikes me dead!'

'You weren't the only one who lost their life like that. It was an epidemic —'

'But where's the sense in that? After everything we'd been through, after four years of fighting! After the elixir of life!

The elixir of this sort of life! Keeping my mind alive after my body died! Of course I'm angry!'

'I don't think it's the elixir that's keeping you here,' said the Doctor. 'Not any more. I think it's the anger.'

'Oh, like a normal ghost! That makes it all so much better.'

'If you want peace, you have to let go of the anger.'

Smith shook his head. 'I tend to hang around this miserable city with its miserable people and their hopeless lives. But

it's no better anywhere else, believe me. They struggle and toil, and all they ever seem able to do is drag each other down.

How can I not be angry? Somebody has to be.'

But even as he was saying the words, he didn't feel it. He felt resigned, weary, cynical. But not angry. He remembered

angry: a righteous fire inside him that made his muscles twitch. What had happened to that? How long ago had it gone?

'You just needed time, Samarjit,' said the Doctor. He couldn't quite keep the Mile from his face. He thought he had won.

t. 'The answer,' said Smith, 'is still no.'

ìt's horrible, cold stuff, this,' said Smith, kicking the snow out from under his feet. He could still move things, but

nobody seemed to notice him do it. hat do you want to be out in it for?'

This was a new tack. They hadn't been outside together since that first time, In the trenches, not as far as he could

recall. But the Doctor had told him a White Christmas was special, something to make a fuss about.

Ìt makes everything pure and clean,' said the Doctor. 'Don't you think?'

'Until it turns to sludge,' said Smith. He stuffed his hands into his pockets and began to walk up the street. He had

taken about ten steps when he realised he wasn't being followed. He turned round. The Doctor was still stood in the

doorway of the pub.

Ì'm not here to exorcise you,' said the Doctor, with finality.

Smith stalked back to him. He was much taller than the Doctor, but he didn't seem able to tower over him.

'Not in the way you think,' said the Doctor. 'You have to find your own peace.'

`Fat chance.'

`Walk down the street. Look in the windows. Tell me if people are miserable or not.'

The snow continued to fall around them. Smith looked up the road. It was freezing. He wanted to be inside. The houses

had lights on: Christmas trees and decorations left on through the night. A fire hazard. It was all so stupid. And yet...

'Not with you watching me. I'll see you in a year.'

Benedict had inherited the Doctor from the guy he'd bought the pub from. That guy, whose name Benedict had long since

forgotten, had been unable to explain how the Doctor got in, or why he came every Christmas, or why he spent the night

quietly talking to himself. Benedict, keen to make his mark on the place, had changed the locks that first year. He should

have been cross to find the Doctor sat there, that first Christmas morning. But somehow, in a matter of minutes, the

Doctor had convinced him that it wouldn't be in keeping with the season just to throw him out. Benedict had even

invited him to have lunch with the family. That had been years ago, when Benedict's kids *were* small. Now, the Doctor's

Christmas morning visits were part of the tradition. The kids came home with their own children to see him.

So Benedict was surprised to find the Doctor asleep at the table. That had never happened before. He was always up,

bright-eyed and full of good humour, eagerly accepting his cup of tea. For the first time ever, the Doctor seemed different.

He looked a year older.

Benedict put a hand on the Doctor's shoulder. He didn't even get a chance to shake him, the Doctor leapt up awake. For

15

a moment he glared at Benedict, but then he shook off his startlement and grinned. Benedict could still see the ill-ease

behind the man's eyes.

'Merry Christmas, Doctor,' said Benedict, magnanimously. 'You look like you've seen a ghost.'

The Doctor smiled, as though he'd heard those words before. 'No,' he said, taking his tea. 'Not this time. So how's your

year been?'

It was the last time Benedict ever saw him.

14

UNIT Christmas Parties:

First Christmas

Nick Wallace

The world had changed.

It had been cold and grey the night before, and Liz had woken to a dusting of snow. It wouldn't last much more than

a couple of hours, but it was amazing how it transformed things: children scraping a half-inch from walls And gateposts

to compact into a snowball; last-minute shoppers suddenly watching their footing; her car leaving a discarded flurry of

white in the air as she left the suburbs behind.

For now, the air was still and cold, leaving the snow to cut silhouettes on bees and bushes.

Liz couldn't deny that the sight still created a childish glow inside of her. Christmastime was a season of peace and

goodwill; an oasis of calm in the chaos of life. Maybe that was why snow felt so right; cloaking the world in stillness,

matching the season's pace and mood, even if— just like Christmas Itself that change was only temporary.

—

Liz knew the signs too well by now. They were there as she showed her pass at

he gate, in Bell's wan smile, the way Munro nodded quickly and then moved as she pushed through the doors into

UNIT HQ. Everyone was walking on hells. Because, with just over a dozen hours left till Christmas, the Doctor and

the Brigadier were arguing. Again.

t

Approaching the staff pigeonholes, Liz paused at the sound of their voices.

e Doctor's lab was that much further way, inaudible from here, which

cant they were in the Brigadier's office, that he had summoned the Doctor.

d, as everyone knew by now, the Doctor never took to being summoned by Ole Brigadier.

Shaking her head free of the distant voices, Liz pulled the stack of envelopes 00m her bag and began distributing them

among the pigeonholes.

'Morning, Miss.'

Liz turned, finding John Benton approaching. She nodded past him: 'How ;Ong have they been going this time?'

1

'Almost ten minutes now.' He frowned. 'I thought you were done for the holidays, Miss Shaw?'

'I was,' Liz answered automatically, 'but —'

Benton nodded. 'Christmas cards.'

`Christmas cards,' Liz affirmed. Ì was going to hand them out at the Christmas party—' She stopped, regretting the

words as soon as she'd spoken them. Somehow it had fallen on Benton to organise the festivities for the UNIT troops and

staff.

Benton shook his head. Ì never should have trusted that place; just because Zbregniev's cousin works there.'

`Double booking, Sergeant,' Liz said, consoling him. `Could have happened to anyone.' The look *on* Benton's face

suggested he didn't believe that was the case. Àt least you got the deposit back.'

Benton smiled. 'But not my dignity, Miss. You should see the looks I'm getting.'

16

Liz tucked an envelope into one last slot, then turned and handed Benton his card. As he took it, she went up on tiptoes to

give him a peck on the cheek. `Merry Christmas, Sergeant Benton.'

Benton blinked, a brief smile fluttering across his lips. 'Thank you, Miss, I mean Liz, I mean Dr Shaw, I mean —' He

stopped himself, smiled again. `Merry Christmas '

Liz looked down at the two envelopes left in her hand: the Doctor and the Brigadier. The Brigadier was too important to

have a pigeonhole, and while the Doctor did have one, he considered himself too important to ever check it.

Liz looked at Benton with pleading eyes. 'I don't suppose you'd —' She was cut off by a particularly loud exclamation

from the Brigadier's office.

Benton looked at the cards in her hand, glanced back at the raised voices, then hurriedly hefted his rifle onto his

shoulder `Sorry, Miss. Guard duty.' And then he was gone.

s

Liz tapped the cards with her fingertips, sighed a very unacademic swearword, then set off down the corridor.

A decrease in volume approaching the Brigadier's office only signalled a temporary lull in hostilities, as, with a sudden

burst of violent exclamations, the door exploded outwards and the Doctor burst through the doorway, a whirl of

frustrated anger cloaked in black velvet.

`Doctor!' Liz called, holding up his card, only to be met by his back as he swept away, barking at her not to disturb him

now.

There was a long moment of silence, followed by a creak as the door slowly rebounded on its hinges. Liz caught it just before

it clicked shut, gave a light tap on the frame to announce her presence, then slipped inside.

She'd expected the Brigadier to be wound tight, fists clenched, pacing a groove into the floor. Instead, he was in his

chair, shoulders down. A crumpled piece of paper was in his right hand, but his eyes weren't really focusing on it.

`Brigadier?' Liz asked.

And suddenly noticing her presence, life stiffened his frame, filling his voice. 'Dr Shaw. Merry Christmas.'

He pulled an envelope from his desk. 'I would have left it in your pigeonhole, but I wasn't expecting you before

New Year.'

Liz smiled, handing his card over in return.

Àh, I see,' he smiled. 'Meant to hand them out at the party, I take it? Bad business; I've told Zbregniev to speak to his

cousin.'

Liz sat down. 'What was it this time?'

The Brigadier sighed and slid the crumpled paper across the desk for Liz to see. 'It's an invoice from General Scobie;

utility usage at the last HQ.'

Liz scanned the figures incredulously. 'You were arguing over the electricity bill?'

`The Doctor has been drawing enough power to light Wembley Stadium five dmes over.'

There was a long silence, Liz letting the frustration drain from the Brigadier's words before she spoke. 'He puts a

brave face on it most of the time, but we both know he doesn't belong here.'

The Brigadier said nothing in reply, but there was a hint of understanding in his eyes.

Ìt's Christmas Eve, Brigadier. There'll be a skeleton staff here tomorrow, but almost everyone's cheery, looking

forward to the holiday. And while we're both tucking into roast turkey and stuffing, he'll be stuck in that drafty lab.'

would have asked him to lunch, but I'm flying out to Geneva first thing.' He paused, and then shook his head

mournfully. 'Christmas Day, of all days.'

'I asked him,' Liz affirmed, 'and he said no.' She paused. Christmas was a time for family and familiar things. She

should have been at a university Amnon an hour ago; the Brigadier was going to be in Geneva, without his family,

tomorrow. 'It's hard being away from what you're used to. Remember bow I reacted? Swept up in your staff car, dragged

down to London, drafted. I didn't want to be part of this outfit ofyours, I wanted my lab in the Cavendish.'

'You changed your mind though.'

'Ha! I was hoping to be at the forefront of humanity's contact with alien cies, making friends, seeing wonders,

learning what's out there. Instead I in to spend my time holding wires and test tubes and watching the bullets

qv She looked out of the window. The sun was creeping through grey clouds, now that had been crisp on branches an

hour ago now consumed by the thaw, stillness bleeding away one drop at a time.

'If it's any consolati 1178

on, Miss Shaw, I value your contribution to —' And then the phone rang.

here was stength in the Brigadiers stride as they left his office.Liz had seen it enough in the few

months they`d known each other a strength of purpose born of his soldier's duty. Except turning the

T

corner to the lab, he stopped short— so suddenly that Liz

ran into the back of him. A bundled mass of cable snaked out of

the lab door, splaying into power conduits and

communications lines in the ceiling. And the fluid energy of the Brigadier's walk was immediately transformed into a

tension across his shoulders.

Liz stood, looking up at the cables for a moment longer, then hurried to catch up with the Brigadier as he threw open

the lab's double doors.

Inside, the chaos was worse. The TARDIS console sat in the middle of the floor, a constant stream of data chattering

from a print slot to a pool at its base. Test tubes, Bunsen burners, and bubbling liquids had been cleared from one corner,

replaced by an eight-foot-high, upright circle of circuits.

Emerging from his police box, the Doctor crossed to check the print-out, then began flicking switches and adjusting

dials all around the console, its constant hum rising in pitch in response.

As the Brigadier finally opened his mouth to speak, the Doctor cut him off. Ìt's all right, Brigadier, I know all about it.'

Àbout what?'

`That spaceship you're about to tell me is on course for Earth. You want me and Liz to plot an intercept trajectory for

those missiles of yours.' He looked up from the console, grinning. 'How am I doing so far?'

Ìnsufferably well.' The Brigadier straightened. 'And?'

`Much as I'm sure blowing something out of the sky would make your Christmas, Lethbridge-Stewart, there are

alternatives.'

The Brigadier pointedly looked at the mess of circuitry. 'And this is...?' Àn alternative.'

With almost all his adult life spent in the military, if there was one sound the Brigadier knew well, it was the slap of army

boots. From parade grounds, to hard sun-baked earth, to the corridor outside his office.

Five minutes to six on Christmas Eve. Five minutes until the Doctor's promised 'alternative' was due.

Emerging from his office, the Brigadier caught sight of a pale brown uniform turning the corner.

By the time he reached the lab, that single uniform had multiplied into a swarm, all fully decked out with latest armoury

issue. A swarm that filled the corridor. Tension that had been building all day exploded in his voice: 'You men! Make way

and stand to attention in the presence of a superior officer!'

Passing down the line, he counted numbers, spotted faces. Reaching the door, he found Munro and Benton rigidly at

attention. Ìf I'm not mistaken, almost the full complement of UNIT personnel is assembled in this corridor. For your

sakes, there had better be a very good explanation.'

Captain and sergeant glanced at each other, then Munro admitted, 'We were called in, sir.'

Èmergency situation,' Benton added. 'All correct codewords issued, sir.'

'I see,' the Brigadier answered. 'And who issued this emergency call?' Benton's pained glance at the door was

confirmation enough.

The Brigadier strode into the lab.

And stopped. The cables now flowed from ceiling to console and on to the circle of circuitry. Not that the circuits were

visible. Because the corner was now occupied by a swirling, twisting mass of distorted light.

'What,' the Brigadier demanded, 'is that?'

'It's an interstitial vortex,' the Doctor answered, wheeling a trolley out of his police box.

'I see,' the Brigadier said. 'And what is it doing in my headquarters?'

The Doctor parked the trolley and turned to him, sighing. 'Well, an Interstitial vortex, it... Well, it punches a hole

in reality, compacting two distant spaces to within a few feet of each other.'

The Brigadier looked again. The twisting light was at its most intense at the edges, possessing some quality that made

it uncomfortable to look at. Punching a hole in reality sounded about right. Squinting, he could follow the line of cables

through that light and onto —

'This is your "alternative", isn't it? That's the spaceship. Through your vortex, that's the spaceship on an intercept

course.'

'More of a collision course, but yes. It's an old Bathesdan derelict; that's the bridge you can see. Poor thing's been drifting

for centuries.' The Doctor checked a reading. 'My "alternative", Brigadier, is to use the TARDIS console ID jump start its

engines and send it back to Bathesda. Neat, tidy, with no danger of radioactive *debris.* Better all round, wouldn't you say?'

'And the UNIT troops in the corridor?'

The Doctor grinned, adjusting his shirt cuffs. 'My dear Lethbridge-Stewart, Pm the most important asset this little outfit

of yours has. Surely you're not golng to let me enter an alien vessel unguarded?'

#4' 'Unchaperoned, you mean!'

The Doctor's face fell. 'At any rate, I thought it best to give the orders you'd %eve given before you thought of giving

them. Besides,' he patted the crate loaded on the trolley, 'I think I've solved the problem of your party venue.' only then

did the Brigadier notice the Brut label stencilled on the crate. Champagne.

,Spinning the trolley towards the vortex, the Doctor said, 'Have a look. If

're not happy, I'll send the ship on its way and everyone can go home.'

Whistling, the Doctor stepped through the light, and onto the alien ship.

The Brigadier glanced over his shoulder at the lab doors, then straightened *kb* back, and marched into the vortex.

re was a moment of disorientation, then his boots resounded on metal. ept, it wasn't quite metal. It had a tinny ring to

ere

it, but the way it just dully baked up light told him it was all wrong.

`Bonded polycarbide,' Liz Shaw called across the room. She looked up from the trestle table she was erecting. 'First

thing I noticed too.'

As his eyes adjusted, the second thing the Brigadier noticed about the alien ship was its, well, alien-ness. It was the

simple things that were most disquieting, like the absence of straight lines. Although barely perceptible on the floor, the

entire room was constructed of curves: arched ceiling, round doors, spherical consoles, rounded buttons.

He sniffed. 'Air's a bit stale.'

Ì've got a unit set up to clear that and deliver Earth atmospheric conditions,' the Doctor said. 'The gravity's a bit

off, too, but it shouldn't be a problem unless Sergeant Benton gets carried away with his dancing.'

`Come and have a look at what we've done,' Liz said.

`Hit the switch, Liz,' the Doctor called.

The chamber was suddenly bathed in light. Coloured flashes raced around conduits in the floor and ceiling. In addition

to the table Liz was erecting, some were already laid out, complete with silver tureens and serving dishes, food steaming.

A pyramid of glasses was carefully balanced, close to the cases of wine and casks deposited by the Doctor.

As he stepped further onto the bridge, the Brigadier noticed a number of spheres floating near the ceiling.

`Loudspeakers,' the Doctor volunteered. 'Wouldn't be a party without music.' He clicked his fingers, and the spheres

pulsed with light, beating out a strange tune. 'That,' he added, 'is Agoran opera. The March of the Cyborgs. But they're quite

comprehensively programmed with music from this era. The Beatles, the Beach Boys, John Smith and the —'

`Yes, thank you, Doctor,' the Brigadier answered. 'And the food?' `They'll need to watch the curry.'

`Hot?'

`Cold. Osirian curry is always best served close to absolute zero. Lovely flavour, but it can crack your tooth enamel.'

The Brigadier said nothing, just stood in the middle of the bridge, slowly turning on the spot to inspect everything before

coming to rest, looking back at the vortex and through it, to the double doors where his men were waiting.

`Well, Brigadier?' Liz prompted.

His mouth was set firm, jaw square, shoulders solid. Then his lips pursed, and he ran a finger across his moustache

before finally rolling his eyes and sighing. 'Oh, all right, then.'

The Doctor said that the ship had been derelict for centuries, maybe millennia. Cold and alone it had drifted

through the vast silence between worlds, haunted by lost souls and empty purpose. But that night the ghosts of centuries past

were exorcised, that night the ship was filled with laughter, light, and noise.

And Liz laughed to see them, all of her straight-laced, straight-faced, professional soldiers having so much fun.

20

21

John Benton was swinging Carol Bell around as the Beatles exhorted them to twist and shout. Too often, Carol looked

terrified by his flailing dance steps, but just occasionally there would be a flash of a smile across her face. Jimmy Munro

was nervously working his way along the buffet, following the Doctor's instructions on the correct way to tackle Venusian

bra'tek'h or something. The Brigadier had spent the first half-hour hovering by the vortex, at the ready, not quite

trusting Yates and the clean-up squad to provide adequate cover at HQ. But even he had slowly drifted away, swept into

the heaving mass of soldiers and staff, bathed in warm coloured light.

Christmas light and Christmas spirit.

Her face flushed, Liz slipped from the dance floor to rest against a console, gathering her dress up around her. It was

something the Doctor had produced from the TARDIS, claiming it had once belonged to Cleopatra and was just the right fit

for Liz.

Sipping at a glass of red, she caught sight of something out of the

corner of her eye. The Doctor and the Brigadier were

together in a corner, laughing and miling, one pouring a whisky for the other.

Then the Doctor pulled a watch from his jacket, and on checking the time, patted the Brigadier on his shoulder and

drifted towards Liz.

As he approached, Liz gave him a smile. 'You made up, then?'

The Doctor absently pulled at an earlobe, musing, 'The Brigadier's not tirely unreasonable. Once he takes the

blinkers off.'

Ànd you agreed to moderate your electricity consumption?'

Àh.' He smiled. 'That may have helped.'

There was a moment of silence, Liz studying the Doctor; velvet and frills gainst bewildering architecture and

technology. So incongruous, so achronistic, but...

`You seem at home,' Liz said, nodding at the alien setting about them. ong all this, I mean. I don't think I

appreciated that until now. The rigadier, me, Benton and the others, all fazed by that vortex and ending up re. But

not you. Despite all of those stories you absently throw off, all those possible places you say you've been, I don't think I

really understood fore. You belong here, don't you? Out among the stars.'

He said nothing, so she took his hand and gave it a squeeze. 'Earth won't be never, you know. Doing this, making good

with the Brigadier, it's a start.' They were silent for a moment, the Doctor checking his watch again before

itting, 'I didn't do this for the Brigadier, Liz.'

Liz frowned, 'I don't —'

He raised a finger to his lips, guiding her into a corner of the bridge. With e last check that no one was watching, he

activated a switch and a door slid en before them.

The room they entered seemed pitch black at first, and as the door shut behind them, the Doctor advised, 'Just let

your eyes adjust.'

She heard his footfall, and as he moved in front of her, Liz's eyes found his silhouette against a large circle, somehow less

dark than the rest of the room. Gaining confidence, she stepped after him.

Ì heard you,' the Doctor said quietly. 'Talking to the Brigadier in his office. I was coming back to apologise, and the

door was open just enough, and...' He paused. 'I hadn't thought how hard this must be on you. Everything I say, about all

the things the universe has to offer, the marvels that await your species's future. And all you do is, what was it, "hold wires

and test tubes and watch the bullets fly"?'

`Doctor, I —'

`You're a woman of science, Liz, and I should have thought about how frustrated I must leave you at times. And I

thought I should do something about that.'

The grey shield in front of them irised open. Below them was a massive crescent, dark against inky blackness, its shape

marked by a slender thread of blue.

And then flame erupted on its outer edge, growing brighter, growing stronger, giving form and weight as that blue

thread fattened, shaded with white and gold. The hues of Earth's atmosphere becoming visible.

Liz slid her hand into the Doctor's.

`Sunrise from orbit,' he said. 'Only a handful of your species have ever witnessed this moment.' The watch chimed

inside his pocket. 'Twelve o'clock,' he said, leaning in to kiss her on the cheek. 'Merry Christmas, Liz.'

23

22

The crimson flare of the sun crept over the horizon, bringing more light with it, tracing weather systems against the

deep azure of the oceans, clouds casting shadows over the land beneath them.

They stood there, hand in hand, friends and equals, the world transformed, more peaceful than Liz had ever known it,

while behind them music played and their newfound family danced into the Christmas dawn.

Somewhere, thousands of miles below, snow was falling.

In the TARDIS: Christmas Day

Val Douglas

***With apologies* to *George R.* Sims for yet another *parody of* In the Workhouse: Christmas Day.**

It is Christmas Day in the TARDIS,

And the doors and walls so white

Are festooned with colourful oddments

And the ship is a pretty sight.

The Doctor, Tegan and Adric

Open presents with childish glee

While Nyssa in Traken costume

Smiles down from the Christmas tree.

`We must have a Christmas pudding,'

The Doctor said at last

As he searched through all the cupboards

For relics of Christmas past.

Àha!' he cried in triumph

And held up a mouldy goo.

À present from Mrs Beeton

Ìn eighteen umpty-two.'

Ì'm not eating that,' said Tegan,

Op'ning Fosters number two.

Ìt looks like something revolting

`Left behind by a kangaroo.'

And even Adric looked doubtful

As he uttered a word most rude —

Which proved the state of the pudding

As he never said no to food.

Òf course!' he piped up brightly.

`You know I'm a genius at sums.

`With Block Transfer Computation

Ì'll make one with raisins and plums.'

The pudding arrived in minutes

And Tegan muttered, 'Golly!

`He's even remembered the brandy

Ànd **the little sprig of holly.'**

She picked up a knife to carve it.

The Doctor held out his plate,

And Adric turned white and tearful

At the thought of the pudding's fate.

`Hands off!' he cried in anguish,

Because he couldn't bear it.

Ì said I'd make the pudding,

`But I didn't say I'd share it.'

`Rats to your pudding!' yelled Tegan

And gave it a hefty kick.

`You're a greedy little bighead,

Ànd I hope it makes you sick!'

The pudding flew o'er the control room

And knocked the Doctor for six.

He sagged at the knees and staggered,

And fell like a tonne of bricks.

The THUD, it rocked the TARDIS, The tree came crashing down.
Òh bother!' said Nyssa, winded, And gave him an

angry frown.

Then the sweet young thing from Traken

In noble rage arose;

She picked up the Christmas pudding

And stuffed it up Tegan's nose.

Water's Edge

Peter Adamson

Christmas Eve, 1953

There was barely a vacant seat on the train. It hummed with office workers, families beginning their holidays, and not a

few others travelling to see their new queen, recently arrived in Auckland. Among them a young Maori man sat.

Matiu looked out as the train slowed alongside the small station, just a concrete platform and wooden shed with a

sign announcing 'Waiouru'. Beyond it the central plateau stretched under a slowly setting, summer sun.

Only one passenger boarded, and he entered the car bustling down the aisle towards Matiu, his hair a mass of blond

curls. Finding the empty seats facing the young man, he sat contentedly; though he wasn't nearly big enough to need

the space; he had no hand luggage for a start. Matiu was taking in the curious blue-on-blue patchwork of his frock

coat when the man leaned forward, his smile vanishing beneath a look of scrutiny.

'Hello. I'm known as the Doctor. And I believe *you're* an anachronism.' 'What?'

'I seem to miss meeting interesting people on trains. So I took care not to miss you.'

Matiu glanced around. No one in the carriage seemed to have heard them. 'I don't know what you're on about,

mate.'

'I think you do,' the Doctor said. 'This sort of thing doesn't usually happen by accident, but I'm prepared to give you

the benefit of the doubt. I want you to come with me and we'll leave this train together.' He leaned closer and ' ,

0

whispered. 'You're very brave. Or possibly very foolish, or possibly you just 4 don't know. But I am concerned for your

safety. Please, come with me. I promise you'll be returned unharmed to where you came from.'

Matiu's eyes met his: 'Get out of my face or I'll call for a guard.'

V The Doctor backed away disapprovingly, hands splayed. 'Have it your way,' L

fee returned. 'But I won't leave you. We'll ride this journey out to its end together. Wherever that may be.'

the end came later that night.

the

The train pulled onward and evening arrived with no further word from Cher man, the Doctor settling back, lips

pursed to regard his fellow ssenger. Dusk softened the eastern hills as the sun disappeared below the

horizon. Sometime after ten o'clock the train pulled toward the outskirts of a small settlement someone had named

Tangiwai. Above it loomed Mount Ruapehu, almost inconspicuous against the night sky.

Still under his companion's scrutiny, Matiu scowled and rose to leave, but the Doctor sprang up and pulled him back

down. 'You don't know where it's safe —' he began.

Matiu shouted him down. The two men locked arms, struggling as a slight shuddering, then a high noise of screaming

metal entered the car. The engine had braked suddenly, and there was a violent surge as the rest of the train caught up

with itself, almost tipping Matiu into the Doctor's lap until finally the car lurched forward again.

Caught in the beam of the locomotive's lamp, a black torrent crossed its path; the bridge ahead had been swept away

and the rails sagged above raging floodwaters.

Hurtling onward, the engine spilled off the tracks, arcing over the swollen river until it struck a bed near the

opposite side. Close behind the tender followed spilling oil, and after it four of the forward carriages, each rear car

shunting the foremost onward and over the break where they jack-knifed in the air before telescoping in the impact.

Lights flickered and died in the cabins, and from where the dead carriages ceased their short flight the cries of

passengers rose. Above them the remainder of the train rested, the sixth carriage half-hanging off the now devastated

bridge.

Inside, people spilled out of their seats and were dagged to the front of the car. Matiu clambered toward the rear

doors, the Doctor far behind him shouting instructions, trying to calm his fellow passengers. As others filled the aisle,

the car groaned and slid from the tracks, passengers screaming as it tumbled into the leaden river.

It landed heavily, rolling downstream and collecting water in its turns.

People collided and were thrown about the cabin, the Doctor grasping for purchase with them until its movement

ceased. Without motion the car was pitch black and icy cold, and injured passengers moaned unseen. Men righted

themselves and stood shaken in the darkness, gasping at the cold water collecting about their waists.

The Doctor found a window above him; he rolled up his coat and pushed the pane out, inviting weak moonlight into

the car. He helped some others through the opening, working to empty the carriage before finally squeezing himself out

and into the warm night air. The side of the car couldn't have

been more than eight inches above water, and all around

debris rushed, torn from the wreckage by a swift black soup of silt-fed water and engine oil. Steam billowed from the

overturned locomotive upstream. From the rear cars and riverbank, a human chain was just starting to form, while

others still strode

through the waves towards the other cars. Over a nearby hill, the headlights of trucks danced, as the first locals alerted

that something had happened raced to the scene.

Matiu was chest-deep in water and wading between cars. He saw the Doctor slide down the carriage roof and plunge into

the flood, legs locked against the current and striding forcefully toward him.

'Is this what you came so far to see?'

Matiu swore. He moved toward a carriage, steadying himself against it as river stones rolled over his feet. 'I'm

looking for my grandfather. His name is Hemi Tokona and he's supposed to be on this train. I tracked him here but I've

lost him. I don't know if he's still alive or what —' He caught his breath, huddled against the wreck. Around them

shapes passed on the water, clothing ripped from passengers, luggage and seating mingled with them. 'I want to

know why... no one saw him again. I just want to see it for myself. I need to know.'

The Doctor took a couple of steps towards him, offering his hand. 'We're not at the water's edge anymore,' he said.

'Neither of us can just stand here and watch everything happen around us. We have a part to play now.'

`You wanted to prevent me from getting here.'

`You endanger yourself being here already. But right now these

people need our help.'

Word spread that the mountain's crater lake had burst that evening, feeding i

f

the river with lahar. They met the rescue teams clearing the cars, the Doctor

2

287

joining the chain while at its end Matiu waded, ducking in and out of the carriages. For a while he was by

himself, finding the odd struggler, but it was late and he preferred not to dwell on what he found more of. He

hadn't really prepared himself for this, the waste of life and misery about him. Eventually a young man calling

himself 'Jim' joined him in the half-light and for a while they worked without speaking. Finally Jim spoke.

'Were you on the train?' 'Yeah. I left Wellington this afternoon.'

ucky you. I couldn't get a ticket, so I caught the army bus up to camp at Waiouru. Managed to pull some favours and

L

got on board there. Turned out to be a short trip. I was hoping to be in Auckland tomorrow.'

ire **Headlights swept across the inside of the car, and through the mud and oil 'Matiu saw Jim's face.**

Jim noticed the young man staring him.

`Hemi. James.'

'Yeah, that's me. But they tend to use "Jim" more down here... Hey, we should keep going, this car's not going to

stay in one place too long.'

*** * ***

They left, Matiu following closely. This man was his grandfather, he was a mathematician working for the army, and

now he was returning to his wife and child. His mind swam with an irresistible urge to both protect the man and

follow him, as Hemi entered another car sheared by the river. From behind them came a sound like thunder and

they saw the shredded carcass of a forward carriage rolling towards them. Matiu sprang toward Hemi, and as he did

he felt something solid tear deep into his shin.

Hemi hauled him to the safety of another car. They huddled there for a moment as the splintered and buckled hulk

scraped past them.

They were not alone. Inside the car, something fought for life: Hemi swam over and found a small girl pinned under

some seating.

Matiu thought he could feel the waters still rising. His leg felt detached, the pain rising in surges, and he was certain

he was bleeding badly.

`Give me a hand with this seat backing, mate!'

Matiu waded over, shaking. The girl's face was only just breaking the surface, her eyes wide as she bobbed in the

frigid water. She could only have been about ten, but she should have been able to keep afloat better. Then he saw the

crutches jutting from the space behind her. Shushing her, Hemi lifted the girl with one arm, his second braced against

the coachwork. Matiu levered the seat back away and the girl's movement increased, but as he did fresh debris

entered the cabin: the car was turning around and had become wedged in a deep channel with the river flowing

unrestrained down its length. Now water rushed in noisily through the opened end. Something heavy slammed into him

and he found himself trapped between the seats, this time with the girl and Hemi on top of him. There was a shout

from the other man, something Matiu couldn't make out, and he saw him swing downstream from him, his big hands

grasping Matiu's shirt collar. The girl was still on top of him, in his arms and screaming, but Matiu was choking under

them and his leg pounded from the cold.

He looked back at his grandfather and met his eyes. He was smiling slightly, then the grip on his collar eased. Matiu

cried out as Hemi let go and was ripped away from him, disappearing out into the fast flowing water. Matiu gasped,

grey foam around his head. The girl was still clinging to him, and in his panic he wanted to throw her off. Her cries

were more distant now, and as the waters closed over his face he found he was no longer thinking about the man he'd

come to find. He could no longer feel the girl as a gritty blackness overcame him.

December 2004

`Get me the photo album, Matiu.'

It was the same lead-up to every Christmas for as long as he could

remember. The humidity of an Auckland summer invaded Nan and Aunty Huia's tiny sunlit lounge overlooking the

mangroves. Nan was getting on a bit now: well into her seventies, with Aunty catching up as best she could. The sisters

had lived together now for five years, and it hadn't been an easy transition. Nan leafed through the album with

trembling fingers like old brown paper. The pages were full of faces, family gatherings, long-gone relatives and

friends frozen in black and white and sepia. She hadn't much family, just Huia and their older brother, Frank, who'd

died years before, but there were plenty of photos of their extended family into whose lives she'd dip and pluck half-

stories from. Matiu found it difficult to keep up, and had often wondered what would become of those stories when Nan

and Huia died; he could hardly rely on himself to remember it all. Of his own family there was Just him and Nan,

really. He'd not known his father and Mum had met some

Australian called Rob who'd wooed her back to Brisbane with tales of spotless beaches and free beer on his station. She'd left

Matiu aged twelve to be looked after by his Nan. That was Mum: there was always someone else around to pick up the

pieces.

Arriving on the page they always returned to, Nan told him about his grandfather Hemi again, his sense of

humour, his dedication to her, and how his own skill at mathematics (`you would have got on like a house on fire, he had

a good head on his shoulders, too') led him to Wellington and the army t camp. How Matiu's mother missed so much in

not having him around. Aunty glanced disapprovingly over with her googly eye. 'And he'd've stayed with you, too, if he

hadn't gone down there on that scholarship! If he'd taken you with

I him he might have been around to help you to raise your child and meet his grandson!'

Nan said nothing but just shook her head, her fingertips

worrying the chair arms; Matiu knew the best of the afternoon

was over and eyed his backpack in the corner.

He put the ladies to bed, Nan asking him to keep the window ajar so she could hear the choir practising in the

Samoan hall down the hill.

Matiu was lost in thought. Cycling beat back the humidity as he passed

';through the university and toward his nearby flat. Like its neighbours, its

Inner scrim-lined walls had been barracked with unyielding whiteboards. His

home doubled as his study and it was here he mingled research with his

leisure time, holding tutorials in the kitchenette, the ideal tenant trudging his

y through scholarship. He left his bike on the back porch and went inside.

he old textbook was on a bedroom shelf; inside was a bookmark, his own photo of his grandfather. He returned

to the lounge and wiped the hiteboards clear. He put on a CD to drown out the evening's silence: nothing o upbeat.

Taking a fresh marker from the ledge he approached the board,

clipped the photo to its side and began; letters and symbols packed tightly together in a blue scrawl.

Hours passed, the CD long since spent. On the board the figures grew in number, spreading out with his calculations

to cover the other walls. With each aspect of the formula addressed a piece of the world fell away. As his calculations

became more determined music returned to the room, a different tune this time. At first a group of whispers, rising

until the familiar sounds of a Samoan community choir rang out. Nan and Aunty were in the room with him. The choir

grew louder and more memories came: his graduation, staying behind after school working on the next day's lesson

while the distant sounds of cricket came from across the playing field. Getting a hiding for pinching some Pineapple

Lumps from Patel's dairy. Watching Mum disappear through the airport departure gates, and Nan holding him tight,

crying into his hair. He was in a different space now: kicking in darkness, the belly around him kicking back,

resisting his being there in the first place. He was going back to where it started to go wrong. The room seemed to

swoon, shadows stretching across the walls. From out of the darkness the choral wail reached, swallowing him up and

buffeting his body; then everything spun, the universe resettling without him. Briefly hanging mid-air his marker

clattered to the floor of the now lifeless room.

December 25,1953

Matiu woke dry and warm, still smelling of the river but looking down to see himself dressed in unfamiliar clothing: army

issue. He was on a canvas camp bed in some sort of community hall with other victims laid out next to him. Heaped in a

corner was a pile of sodden clothing, mud-caked and black with oil. Blankets divided the room in half, and no sound

came from the other side. The haste with which this makeshift hospital had been arranged was plain: crepe paper

streamers still hung around the hall's tiny stage, and lying on its side was a pine tree, likely taken from the hills

nearby, its baubles and trimming buried in the foliage. Christmas was cancelled this year.

`You're a very lucky 3031

young man.'

An army nurse came over, smiling through tiredness. Matiu sat up, his leg was bandaged and the pain had all but

gone.

`What happened?'

`Someone pulled you out of the carriage you were in. You had a girl with you. You probably saved her life.'

`Who got me out?'

Ì'm sorry, I don't know. Look, when you're able, could you see the officer at the door? We're collecting names of all

the passengers, it's been quite difficult.'

* * *

Matiu got up and walked past the desk and out into daylight.

In the valley below, the waters had subsided and ruined carriages lay half exposed in banks of mud, looking ancient

and useless.

He found the Doctor, coat-less and working silently among the men clearing debris from the water. There were

fewer there; most had returned to their homes now that there was little left to do.

`Thanks for getting me out. I thought I was dead for sure.'

`You knew it was me?'

Matiu reached into the breast pocket of his army shirt and pulled out the photo of his grandfather. 'This had to come

from somewhere, didn't it?'

Though they searched the estuarine banks they found no sign of Hemi. They stood in silence for a while.

Finally the Doctor spoke. The Queen's Christmas message will

note this, and there'll be prayers in St Paul's

tomorrow.'

Matiu nodded.

`The river carried a lot of things out to sea. If you wish we could stay to search further?'

Matiu thought back to the district hall and the streamers fading in the window, and thought of a new widow waiting

unknowing in Auckland.

Ì think I've seen enough. It's Christmas Day. I've got family waiting.'

Smiling sadly the Doctor complied, and the two turned away and headed for home.

Claiming *one hundred* and fifty-one *lives,* the tragedy at Tangiwai (a Maori name

Meaning 'weeping *waters') is New* Zealand's fifth *greatest* human *disaster* and was, *for* a

time, the world's *eighth* worst railway calamity. The characters in this story are fictional,

t *the* timing of the *real event* carries an association that is felt in that country to this

y.

A Yuletide Tale Part One

Being a Most Heart-warming and Improving Account of the

Utmost Edification, and Not to Mention Profound Moral

Rectitude, by Mr D.R. Stone

The snowflakes fell upon G—d's good Earth like as to feathers plucked from the wings of an Angel... although, if Angel

it had been, such an Angel must have been some cold, and cruel, and bitter wretch, forever cast out from the Host of

Stars and D—mned to spend all of Eternity in the very depths of H—des with his Infernal Master the D—vil himself!

The snow was cold and sharp as a grandmother's tongue... if that grandmother had been known about the town to

be particularly sharp-tongued, and was dead.

The crystal flakes fell upon the denizens of London as they bustled through the streets on this merry Yuletide Eve. They

fell upon the jarvies perched atop their hansom cabs; they fell upon the gypsy flower-women with their sprigs of lucky

heather; they fell upon the honest clerks and cut-purses alike. They fell upon the hulking forms of mechanical alien

conveyances as they lay waste to entire districts around them... but most of all, it seemed, they fell upon Poor Tom.

`Gam, you filthy littel beast!' bellowed a corpuscular pieman, as Poor Tom nuzzled at his trousers in an attempt to gain

some small degree of succour. 'I have nothing on my tray for the mangy likes of you!'

The bedraggled black-patched kitten (for that, alas, was the station of Poor Tom in life) dodged smartly from the

pieman's hefty kick, and it was fortunate, for Poor Tom in any event, that he did. For at that very instant, a

galvanistic Death Ray struck from above and incinerated him, the pieman, pies and all, where he stood.

All that remained was a pair of smoking boots. There was nothing good to eat about a pair of smoking boots, in the

considered opinion of Poor Tom... nothing good to eat even for one who has never been so hungry in his life.

How he longed to be back in the warm and happy home from which he had been so cruelly ousted, with kind Mr and

Mrs Cumbundersnatch and their forty-seven children. It had hardly been his fault, after all, that their youngest, crippled

daughter, Small Doris, had succumbed to the suffocation. Poor Tom had, after all, merely been looking for some

comfortable place to curl up and sleep.

Now, the crowd around him milled and screamed as further Death Rays rained down from the winter sky, cutting

through the feathered snowflakes with hisses that, altogether, combined amongst themselves to take upon the

aspect of a bestial roar. Poor Tom clawed and scrambled through the forest of legs until, at last, he reached the dark

mouth of an alley, and darted within.

In the alley, a frail and frostbitten little girl attempted to sell matches to those who might pass. In this she was somewhat

inconvenienced, for the little girl was blind, and had thus positioned herself directly facing the wall.

Òh, sir...' she whispered, sensing the movement of Poor Tom as he passed by, can it be that you are some cruel

Illusion of the last extremities of hypothermia... or might you be some Seraph, come to bear me from the Miseries

and Durance of this Mortal Realm...?'

And with that, she pitched back violently, hit the ground with a thump and expired upon the instant from the cold,

her single leg sticking up in the air, and the fractured twig that had served her most inadequately as a crutch lying at a

pitiably sad angle. For in addition to being, blind, penniless and an orphan, the little match girl had been every bit as

crippled as, once, had been Small Doris. Even more so, probably.

Poor Tom paid the dead match girl no heed, it being obvious that she was in no fit state to feed him, and continued on

his way toward the far end of the alley... where, as he knew, it would open on a dark backstreet containing piles of

totter-refuse awaiting collection, and in which he might find something fit to eat, and somewhat less of a

preponderance of screaming and exploding people.

Just before he got there, though, he came upon a second scene, this latter comprising of a thin and somewhat wash-

wasted Lady of the Night (one of those Fallen Women who are no better than they ought to be and, alas, infest the more

disreputable districts of our Fair Municipality) confronting a bullish ruffian of a man with a puckered scar down the side

of his unshaven face and a stout knobkerrie stick clutched in his hand.

`You take these here shillin's, Big Bill Scrote,' the young jade cried, flinging the coins in question in the man's evil and

phrenologically subnormal face. 'Them's all I have on me, and much good may they do yer! As for the child, you'll never

find him. I've 'id 'im away, I 'ave, where you can never trouble him again!'

`What's this, Sticky Sal?' the brute roared. 'You'd seek to deprive me from my livelihood, d—mn yer eyes, of sending

young Jeremy Bender into the townhouses of rich old misers, by way of the littel window thing you get over some front

doors, the name of which I have temporarily forgot? Well, then, Sticky Sal... we's a-goin' to have *words* about that, Sticky Sal,

you just sees if we don't!'

The thug raised his knob stick, and there is no question that things would have gone hard for poor Sticky Sal... had

not a ghastly collection of alien tentacles chosen that very moment to burst into the alley, from the dark backstreet

beyond, wrapped themselves around the body of Bill Scrote and dragged him bodily back into the darkness from

whence they had come.

Àaarghr came the frantic voice of Big Bill Scrote. 'It's had me bl--dy arm off! This is a right old rorty business, this

is, an' no mistake!'

For the barest instant, Sticky Sal stood, stunned somewhat at the fortune and agency of her deliverance. Then a

further set of tentacles whipped themselves around her, and hauled her off in an instant. Her screams were,

subsequently, most heart-rending and pathetic. And then there was nothing but the busy sound of alien mastication.

Poor Tom sighed, insofar as a small black-patched cat can sigh. It seemed that everybody was getting a fine meal, this

Yuletide Night, but him.

Judging that the alien-infested backstreet would be no place for a small black-patched cat, Poor Tom left the shelter of a

discarded sign board, behind which he had been hiding from the notice of Sticky Sal and Big Bill Scrote. There was a

storm grate in the alley, moved aside by some previous hand; Poor Tom dropped down to find himself in the sewers. He

cast around himself for a moment, cautiously sniffing the air, and then set off in the hope of finding some nice fat rat.

What Poor Tom found, in fact, were rats of quite some other stripe entirely.

In the noisome and unremarked-upon oubliette of a catchment vault, through which the fetid and quite repellent

odour of the city swirled, a farraginous assortment of urchins – a somewhat less than entire set of warm winter clothes

between them – gathered themselves around a gentleman in a moth-eaten scrapwork coat and a strangely pristine

stovepipe tile fully half again as tall as he was himself.

`Now don't you be a-worryin', my fine lads,' this gentleman was saying. 'We'm all of us be safe from them there

hideous alien death machines down here, and make no bones about it. You just listen to your kind old Uncle Bagel.'

'Please, dear Uncle Bagel,' piped up a minuscule urchin, between wracking and consumptive coughs and waving one of

his three crutches to attract the stovepipe-hatted gentleman's attention, 'but my internal organs appear to have

prolapsed due to certain complications arising from acute malnutrition.'

'Acute malnutrition, is it?' declared the gentleman. 'Lessons will take your minds away from the suchlike of

grumblin' bellies and the lupus! Now tell me, my fine lads, what d'ye do when you see some toff a-walkin' down the

street like this?'

The gentleman began, theatrically, to mince through the filth of the sewer, a much-used handkerchief pressed

languidly to his hugely Semitic nose. 'What d'ye do, me fine lads, eh?'

'Stab him in the kidneys, and when he goes down kick him in the head and nick his change purse?' opined an urchin

slightly larger than the rest and in a flat cap. And with an ear trumpet, for he was tragically deaf.

`Right you are, young Crafty Sh—tehawk,' the gentleman affirmed. 'That's

the stuff to give 'em! An' you can tell 'em Uncle Bagel said so if'n they don't believe yer.'

`Pardon?' said The Crafty Sh—tehawk.

Ì have, this very Yuletide Eve, made up a song about it,' said Uncle Bagel. He opened his mouth, no doubt to give voice

to the air in question... and then, perhaps mercifully, closed it again, and regarded a dark corner of the catchment

area curiously.

`Do my eyes deceive me,' he said at length, 'or do I not espy a smallish, blackpatched cat in that dark corner?'

As one, the faces of the urchins turned to regard Poor Tom, their eyes —those of them who had eyes, and had not lost

them in a terrible and awful detonating apothecary accident — lit up with gleeful hunger.

`Let's eat it,' one of the wee tots suggested.

The comestible suggestion, it seemed, agreed to some large extent with all those present. The horde of urchins advanced

with various cries of Turn!' and `Save the parson's nose for me!' except, of course, for those who were struck congenitally

dumb.

Poor Tom decided, 36

in the light of recent events, that here was not entirely the safest place to be. He pelted from Uncle

Bagel and the advancing urchins, disappearing into the sewer tunnels at such speed that not even the strongest and most

intact had a chance of keeping up.

Behind him, as he made his escape, he became aware of the sound of several, somewhat muffled, explosions. Then

the hissing of some infernal gas.

"Tis the Mutagen!' came the frantic voice of Uncle Bagel, wafting up the sewer tunnel. 'Try to hold yer breaths, me

fine lads and... Arrgh! Whuurgh! Brek! Tik! Wh000rk!'

Uncle Bagel and the urchins, Poor Tom realised vaguely, having caught sight of such things before, were at this

moment being busily converted into a certain quantity of reddish slime, at the agency of a particular gas which, it seemed,

the aliens utilised in the extermination of vermin. In any event, it was something of a blessing that Poor Tom had been

frighted to run when he did.

Not entirely fortunate, however. Any rat he found here, now — even a rat not reduced to reddish slime — would smell too

wrong to eat.

Somewhere, in even the smallest capacity, there must be something for Poor Tom to eat...

The totter's yard was piled with all kinds of refuse, of the sort that totters commonly collected from the backstreets...

though so far as Poor Tom was concerned, he could not imagine why it should be collected and piled so, such inedible

portions of it in any event, or of what use to anybody it could possibly be.

As he climbed out from the sewers through a ditch-breach, he noticed that amongst the jumble stood something a little like a

workman's hut, or like the wardrobe in which nineteen of the Cumbundersnatch children had slept of nights. It was

painted a dark, but vivid, blue.

The door of the thing was open, and from beyond it Poor Tom could hear voices:

`By G—d!' a voice exclaimed. 'I but would never thought to see the like! 'Tis bigger on the inside than the out!'

Òh bl—dy h-11,' said another, female voice. 'Not another one.'

To be continued. .

Spookasem

The baby next to us is crying, so I make the monkey dance in front of her buggy. I'm not sure how I do it, but the kid is

really impressed. Her eyes boggle, and laughter bubbles out of her chocolate-smeared mouth.

I tell her, 'My dad says this Adventure Park used to be a zoo, years ago. Imagine if the animals got free, eh? Lions

roaming around, and hyenas laughing? And look! Dancing monkeys!'

Her ugly mother finally notices that her kid's stopped wailing. She wipes her fat hands down her FCUK t-shirt and

whines, 'Kelly-Ann, w37

hat is it now?' When she sees the monkey, her big mouth opens like a tunnel, and she screams.

You can see where the kid gets it. Anyway, this is when I stop concentrating, and the monkey vanishes abruptly.

The ugly woman is still shrieking. 'Where did it go? Is it there?' So I leave her and the baby by the merry-go-round, and

hurry over to my parents at the food stand. It's done up like a giant hot dog, with mustard spelling out WendiWorld

Hot Dogs' over a bun painted in flaking brown paint. The sales guy is dressed as Appel, Wendi's cartoon pet. So he doesn't

look much like a dog, but he does look very hot.

Mum and Dad haven't noticed I have gone, of course. No point telling them how I created a monkey out of thin air,

because they're still bickering. Mum has her arms folded, and Dad's doing that holding-his-nose thing, so I know they

must be talking about John. Dad fancies himself as an impressionist, and enjoys mocking John's nasal Afrikaans accent, or

making some comment about John's alleged writing career. Dad loves it when he thinks that Mum's not getting on with

her boyfriend. Truth is, she's just not getting on with Dad.

Ìf you don't both behave,' I interrupt them, 'then when we leave I won't be buying you a WendiWorld present.'

They stare at me as though they've only just remembered it's my eleventh birthday treat. Well, my eleven-and-a-halfth

birthday treat. My real birthday is 25 December, so it's kind of a tradition to celebrate exactly six months later. Since the

divorce, this is the onl 39

y time of year I see them together, if you don't count shouted conversations down the drive at weekend

drop-offs.

So here we are in WendiWorld. The slogan appears everywhere, in pastel paint that peels off in the bright summer sun:

'A Land of Play Fun for Pre-Teens!' Pre-schoolers, more like. I grew out of this after Year Five.

`Sorry, Melissa,' says Dad. 'Do you want a hot dog?'

`Not after I ate all that spaghetti carbonara,' I say. I point at my guide map.

Coloured blobs mark out the stands that dot the park, disguised as giant hot dogs or red phone boxes or jousting tents.

'Dad, why do they call these things "minor concessions"?'

`The food makes a minor concession to being edible, I suppose,' he says. I let him buy me a Diet Coke. 'C'mon, we've

still got a lot of the amusement park to see. And then we can buy you your present.' He plucks off his sunglasses and

squints at me. 'Something to replace that tatty old shirt?'

`Stop it, Jason. You know John bought her that,' hisses Mum, 'it goes with that horrid baseball cap you got her.' She

stomps off down the tarmac path towards the boating lake.

Dad throws up his hands in a 'what did I say?' gesture. 'It's a murky green, Sandra. And blue goes with your eyes, doesn't

it Mel?' He flicks my pony-tail, where it spills out through the baseball cap. 'I think that hat suits you.'

I grab his hand and chase after Mum, trying to keep us together. I wouldn't have chosen the shirt or the hat. I only

pulled them from the back of my wardrobe this morning to keep my stupid parents happy. I mean, a baseball cap with

bows? Oh, please! If they'd let me bring Chloe, no way would I be wearing this stuff

We're in TravelLand now. The crowds have swollen as midday approaches. Even families who can't stand each other are

drawn magnetically together, the force of their resentment equal and opposite to their fear of being swept downstream by

the pre-teen tide. The only people who stand out are the WendiWorld staff. Most of them are tall, and in their brightly

coloured costumes and cartoon heads they're obvious even in the crush. One of them looks away when I catch his eye; he's

dressed like an adventurer, maybe a character on safari, in a crumpled linen suit and a straw hat.

We're in danger of getting drawn into thèSlo-Boat Adventures of Erik' (Wendi's wet boyfriend). I decide that the sight

of people playing Appel and Wendi's fairy friend, Jessiebell, may be enough to make me heave. There's a huge queue for

the monorail, but at least there's shade beneath the bamboo and tenting structure, and I persuade Mum and Dad to go

there instead. We make our way through the entrance. It's flanked by pale figures dressed as jungle explorers, both with

a butterfly net clutched to their stiff khaki chests. Their expressions show the cool disinterest of the shop dummies they

once were, plainly unimpressed by the fat pink-and-yellow, stuffed python hanging above them.

We snake back and forth in the queue beneath the awning. Mum takes off my baseball cap and smoothes my hair.

'Have you decided on our birthday present?'

I've seen a WendiHouse on the WendiWebSite. The whole front of the house folds down on hinges, to reveal all the rooms

with their tiny furnishings in vivid and over-coloured detail. So I suggest that, to see what reaction I'll get. Mum's frowning

already. 'I think that's a bit expensive.' (I know: it's £249.99.)

Àye,' says Dad, doing what passes for his Glasgow accent, 'that'll be a few shillings more than yer poor parents can

afford.'

Àre you making fun of Mr Wiles now?' I ask him. It's weird when your parents are disrespectful about your

schoolteachers.

Àye,' he persists, 'a Scottish man teaching English.'

`That's a Scotsman, Dad. And you're the one who's being mean. You wouldn't let me bring Chloe.'

He's tugged the baseball cap out of Mum's pocket. 'Never mind your school friends, you could have brought your invisible

friend, Brenda.'

`Barbara,' I remind him. 'And ha ha. I'm not four any more.'

Mum smiles. 'You've always had a vivid imagination, darling. It's a gift, I suppose.'

`Not the sort of gi

ft I want.' I scowl at them both.

I know why Chloe's not here, of course. It's Dad's punishment for us both bunking off. Those few heady hours away

from school were great, it was like being a budgie set free. Chloe and me, we had no fear. Well, maybe just a nagging

worry we might get spotted. And even then, to see our teachers outside school at lunchtime in the precinct: it was like

seeing lions outside their cages! We spotted Mr Wiles buying sandwiches in Tesco, and laughing, and Miss Gregson beside

him and calling him `David'!

But our parents didn't understand. Being 'under control' is a big thing for Mum and Dad, even if they can't control

their own lives. For me, control is getting our Labrador to blink first when we have a staring competition.

I put on the grumbliest, sulkiest voice I can manage, and I say, 'Chloe came along when John brought us.'

As soon as I've mentioned it, of course, I regret it. Dad's off on one now, bombarding Mum with questions. 'When was

this...?' and 'I thought we agreed...?' and 'Isn't this place our special...?' Mum hasn't told him about our half-term visit.

Now I think about it, I must have avoided the subject for exactly the same reason: this reaction. The queue that snakes

around us quivers with embarrassment. People can't decide whether to smile in sympathy or look away, so they end

up with dummy expressions.

I wish there was something to distract them, and of course there is. The pink-and-yellow python squeezes its way

through the latticework of bamboo and cloth above us. Its impossible purple eyes blink down, and the woodwork creaks

ominously.

A bald man in a muscle vest is the first to spot it, and bellows a warning. The crowd parts, yelling, spilling over the chain

barriers and away. This allows the shop dummies to walk stiffly over and wave their feeble butterfly nets at the monstrous

snake overhead.

Mum and Dad are baffled by the sudden commotion. But by now, things are calm again. I spot the little park attendant in

the safari suit examining the jungle adventurer dummies. Above us, the stuffed snake hangs inert from a

bamboo crossbeam. I imagine how we might look from up there: two adults and a kid, surrounded by a litter of dropped

candyfloss and hot dogs. My Coke has been dashed from my grip. On the bright side, though, we're first in the queue for

the monorail.

By the end of the ride, I've really got the hang of this. Stuffed crocodiles yawn hugely when we pass. The giraffe scoops

down its stiff wooden neck to reach a bale of straw. As we clatter by in our carriage, a small herd of artificial zebras scatters in

alarm and gallops off across the field.

`That was strange,' says Mum later. We're climbing *up* the hill to StoryLand, skirting the fir-tree maze that reaches higher

than Dad's head. In the distance, Jessiebell's Castle stretches its turrets into the blue, blue sky. 'That monorail. I don't

remember the animals from last time. I mean, last year,' Mum adds hurriedly.

Dad's eyeing her suspiciously, so I interrupt his thoughts: 'This place was a zoo, years ago, wasn't it, Dad?'

`Yes,' he wonders.

`They seemed awfully close, didn't they?' says Mum.

`Why, though?' demands Dad suddenly. He confronts Mum on the pavement. 'You let him bring Melissa here just

two months ago? When you knew we were planning —'

You don't cry when you're in Year Six, you just don't. So when I feel my eyes stinging and my legs shaking and an ache

seizing me across my whole torso, I know I have to hold it all down or just fling the feelings out and away as far a

s

I

c

a

n

.

At the top of the StoryLand hill, the evening fireworks start three hours early. Visitors 000h and aaah as the rockets

shoot up. The pyrotechnics burst and glitter before leaving their own little clouds against the plain blue sky. A couple of

park attendants, dressed as courtiers, stare into the air in surprise and astonishment. The safari guy is there too, but he's

not looking up. He holds onto his hat as a stiff breeze starts from nowhere, and he studies the fir hedge beside him.

The edge of the maze undulates, ripples and shrugs off a slew of bright foliage. The safari guy has vanished inside now.

A sharp breeze gusts from nowhere, seizes the displaced pine needles, and whirls them into a green vortex that flies

between Mum and Dad as they face each other. Mum throws up her hands to ward it off.

`Come on!' I call. 'Let's go into the Dragon's Maze!' I dart across the pavement to the entrance. A chipped cardboard

knight welcomes us. As soon as we step through the arch of foliage, the wind drops and the fireworks fade and die.

I point ahead. The viewing platform at the centre of the maze

looms over the fir hedges. 'I'll race you to the middle! Last

one there buys the g 43

hostbreath!' And with that, I'm chasing off around the corner.

Within moments, I've scurried left, or nipped right, with my hand over my mouth to stifle the giveaway giggles. I stop

for a moment, panting with the effort and the excitement. In the corner of my eye, I'm sure I've seen the safari guy's linen

suit. When I look about, he's not there.

The maze layout has doubled me back on my original route. I can hear Mum and Dad's voices through the hedge. If I

press my face up against the fir, I can make out their shapes only a metre away.

'Oh, all right,' Mum is saying. 'Yes. Ghostbreath is what *he* calls it. It's spookasem in Afrikaans, it's just an imaginative

description...'

`Bloody John!' Dad is raging.

`...for candyfloss. Oh, for God's sake, Jason, it's just a word.'

`No,' Dad's saying coldly. 'It's more than just a word, Sandra. It's him again.'

Mum's voice is panicky. 'Where is she?'

Ìt's always him,' Dad continues, 'always his words. It's like he's writing me out of her life.'

`Where is she?' Mum's moving away now. She raises her voice. 'Melissa? Melissa!'

I can't call back. My voice has vanished. I can feel the pine needles prickling against my face, and the tears itching in my

eyes.

`Melissa!' Now Dad's shouting, too, moving away. 'Sandra, come back, we don't all want to get lost.'

I can't stop the tears now. My heart is hammering, and my breath is coming in whoops. I think my legs are trembling,

but then I find that the ground is quivering beneath me, pulsating. Pine needles start to drop around me in a soft rain.

I'm looking at them as they carpet the maze around me, when I see the safari guy is standing next to me. He's gripping

his furled umbrella. It's got a question mark on it, just like the ones you see in the WendiSpell kits for toddlers.

`Hello, Melissa. I'm the Doctor.' Dad wouldn't like him, he has an accent like Mr Wiles. 'It's important that you listen to

what I have to tell you.'

My voice is like a mouse's squeak. `No way. I've learnt about this at school. "Stranger danger." Leave me alone.'

This Doctor's just standing there, about three metres away. The shaking ground is an ominous background noise, yet I

can still hear him. He leans on his umbrella. His voice is calm, clear, urgent. 'I'm here to help you, Melissa.'

Ì don't need your help.'

Ì think you do, Melissa. Can't you sense what's happening? You feel excited, but not scared. A little bit angry

maybe? A bit out of control?'

`Control!' I laugh. 'You're like my parents. I'm not scared of you.'

The Doctor frowns. 'It's not me you should be scared of, Melissa.' He jabs a finger at the sky. It's full of boiling grey and

black clouds. Where did they come from? A wind is whistling through the maze, whipping the pine needles around

us. 'You're channelling a power here in the park. You must be able to feel it. It's an alien sprite that was abandoned here

on Earth hundreds of years ago.'

Ì don't believe in fairies.'

'This is no Jessiebell! Or if it is, she has savage teeth and an urge to destroy. You've got to calm down, Melissa, or the alien

will reincarnate itself in the middle of this packed amusement park. And then go on to devastate the south coast of

England.'

He's still not come closer, but his words burn into my mind. 'See what it sees, Melissa. Feel what it feels.'

I close my eyes, and I can still see! I can see right over the park! I'm looking down from the rollercoaster, from the very top

of the Serpent Ride.

No! I am the Serpent Ride!

There aren't carriages any more, they're my tail flicking side to side. My claws scrabble across the tracks, tearing

them like spaghetti strands. I'm rising up, my wings thrash in the warm air, and I'm aloft over the park. When I yell, a

gout of flame leaps from my throat. With a thrill of elation, I focus my narrow eyes on TheatreLand and it ignites beneath me.

The side of *a* building crumbles, peeling away to leave four rooms visible, their tiny furniture and carpets scorched like a

ruined doll's house.

`Can you sense it, Melissa?'

`Yes!' I gasp.

`How does it feel?' 44

45

`No fear! It's like... freedom! I'm in control...'

`No, you're not! It's controlling you. Using you. *Feel* it, Melissa!

See it! The *creature* is in control!'

I open my eyes to glare at him. He's pinned me with his sharp grey eyes. All around, I can hear people screaming. Above,

the Serpent writhes and coils above the maze's viewing platform.

And there, dangling over the platform's edge, is my Dad. Mum grips his arm, helping him over, almost falling with

him. Dad strains to reach me. 'Melissa! Stay there!'

I close my eyes, and the Serpent's vision overwhelms me again. I can see the platform from above.

The fat FCUK woman is running for the stairs, she's lost her kid. The tiny shape of my dad drops to the

ground.

I feel my serpent lungs inhaling, ready to scorch the earth. And I yell -- with my eyes open. 'Dad!'

The gale rages, and the maelstrom of noise reaches a crescendo. The colossal Serpent rears and bucks. For a long

moment its eyes seem to meet mine, and I stare it down. It blinks and pulls back its head, like a cobra ready to strike

down. The head keeps going back, snapping on its neck, and with a gruesome shriek it explodes into a millions shards of

light and the sky is full of fireworks.

Dad is right beside me, and I grab him and hug him as hard as I can.

I haven't seen the Doctor since then. I'm not even sure what was real and what was imagined, whether he was really

there. Later, I think I spot him disappearing behind one of the fancy concession stands, but when I look behind it there's

no one there.

`Seen a ghost?' laughs Dad.

`Maybe,' I say. I take his hand and sqeeze it for reassurance. Calming my fears. Taking control.

`Well, I don't think you'll find them haunting police boxes. Come on, if we run we can get the hill train back up to the

shop. Get your birthday present?'

He and Mum are already haring off to get in the train queue. After a couple of steps, I have to stop to have a last look

back for the Doctor. But I can't even see the police box any more.

In the WendiShop, Dad buys me a green t-shirt with a maze motif and a matching windcheater. Then we make our way

quietly through the exit and back to the car parks. Before we leave, Dad steers his car all the way over to Mum's so that he

can say goodbye to us both without shouting.

I worry that he looks so sad as he drives away. But my friend Barbara will tell me later that Dad is smiling when he

arrives home.

Christmas Special

Marc Platt

The Doctor threw off his kaleidoscopic coat and balanced precariously on the chair, angling a makeshift TV aerial back

and forth high above his head. The aerial consisted of a length of cable attached to a rubber plant from the TARDIS's

conservatory. Across the console room, the TV screen scrolled and flickered, refusing to resolve into any sort of picture at all.

He had seen the TV set in an antiques shop near Shepherd's Bush market. Every time he passed the shop, whatever year

it was, the TV was still in the window, but always closer, apparently edging its way forward, eager to get itself noticed.

'Won't get a picture like this anywhere else,' called the smiling shop man, who was also always there, whatever the century.

The set had a sort of retro-fascination: its spindly, screw-on legs; the fabric cover for the loudspeaker like plastic

tweed; the lifeless, slightly bulbous screen, which was somehow pregnant with the same promise of secrets as a locked

door. `Go on, Doctor,' called the shop man in the year of the attempted Ordrulfi invasion. 'Pure seventies nostalgia,

that is. Give yourself a treat for Christmas.' But the Doctor, who was always busy, had neither time nor money to make

the purchase.

Later, having extinguished the fiery Ordrulfi in his usual nick of time, he had hurried back to the TARDIS, fighting

through crowds eager to catch the Christmas lights and the new volcano on Ealing Common. But the thought of that TV set

had followed him home. It itched at the back of his mind where he couldn't reach to scratch it. It was nonsense of course.

What did he want with a grimy and dilapidated purveyor of cheap gratification?

47

48

And then there had been the knock at the TARDIS door.

Outside on the muddy grass of Shepherd's Bush Green, sat the television... The fairy lights in the shops across the road

reflected on its dead screen. Who knew if it was the gift of a festive well-wisher, or if it had followed the Doctor home by

itself, like a lost dog choosing a new master? He had heaved it into the TARDIS, wiped it down with his sleeve and tried to

set it up. But now he Was wondering why he'd bothered. The reception was terrible. No matter what contortion he got

himself into re-angling the aerial, the picture refused to appear.

In exasperation, he unplugged the rubber plant, tugged away the

back cover of the set and immediately saw the

problem. A small purple piece of Christmas tinsel was lodged in between the ancient valves. He gingerly edged it out

with a pencil. The TV whumphed and was back in business. The addition of an aerial had probably just confused it.

*** * ***

Christmas on his own for once. No cards to write, no presents to battle over on Oxford Street. No stockings to fill or

ghosts to lay. How relaxing just to sit back and enjoy the seasonal television fare. The Queen's Christmas Message was

followed by The Sound of Music and Disney Time. The Doctor fetched his last secret tin of Mrs Beeton's homemade mince pies

from the stasis cabinet in the TARDIS pantry and indulged himself trying to solve a problem like Maria, and fathoming the

aerodynamics of Mary Poppins's umbrella. A warm, cosy glow snuggled through the TARDIS. The sparkle, the bobbing

robins, the snow... snowing... sparkling... bob-bob-bobbing...

Snow blew in ripples along the dingy corridor, past the sign pointing to STUDIO B. The Doctor pushed shut the door

where Christmas was getting in and shivered away the cold. In the gloom, he caught echoes of an audience's half-hearted

laughter, and a man's voice, friendly, chatty, a bit desperate. 'Do we have a coach party with us from Morecambe?' The

ghost of a joke about Spaghetti Junction and bolognese sauce rattled round the walls. The echo and the audience reaction

sank without trace. The Doctor tripped over a set of sleigh bells.

He delved into his pocket for a moment of reassurance, cold fingers scrabbling for the TARDIS key. But the key was not

there. He spun on his heel, slapping and plunging into other pockets as he hurried back to his ship. Along empty

passages, past dressing-room doors with tarnished stars, until he turned the corner into the abandoned Selina Scott tea

bar where he had left the TARDIS. He halted abruptly, transfixed by disbelief. The TARDIS was gone too.

On the floor where his ship had stood sat a flattened strand of tinsel, its third dimension crushed away, as perfectly

pressed as a Victorian cornflower. Behind him, something scrabbled. Another strand of tinsel was sliding out of sight round

the corner like the tail of large festive dinosaur. But when he reached the turning, the passage was empty. No sign or

sound. Only a song scrolling in his head: 'Bring me something in your smile, something laughter crocodile?' — that couldn't

be right — `... on the Nile? ... please redial?'

Above a door marked 'STUDIO B', a red light labelled 'RECORDING: DO NOT ENTER' buzzed into life.

The Doctor pushed the door and stepped inside.

Disembodied calls of 'Quiet please' echoed back and forth like a game of catch. Across an empty darkened stage hung a

pair of vast yellow curtains. Light seeped irresistibly from beyond. A roll of drums.

ANNOUNCER And now, from the heart of London's Shepherd's Bush, it's time for *Eric and Ern's*

Christmas Show!

An eruption of riotous applause and that tune again, blazed out by a variety

big band. The Doctor waited behind the curtains, listening to the banter from the other side.

ERIC

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

ERN

Good evening and welcome to the show.

ERIC

Oh, hey, look. What a smashing audience!

ERN

Lovely.

ERIC

E spec ia ll y w he n y ou think they w ere o nl y l et out

this afternoon.

IRE

Good behaviour?

ERIC

No. Care in the Community.

***RN**

Are 49

the doors locked?

ERIC

Oh, yes. Otherwise they'll be off back down the pub.

***RN**

T he n i t ' s a g o o d t hi ng w e ha v e s uc h a n e s t e e me d

guest with us tonight.

ERIC

Esteemed as in Christmas pudding.

ERN

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome one of our

finest superheroes...

ERIC

He's not wearing tights, is he?

ERN

N o t s o y o u ' d n o t i c e . L a d i e s a n d g e n t l e m e n , t h e

Doctor!

Another explosion of applause. The Doctor looked round for the celebrity using his name, but no one was visible. After a

moment, the curtains ruffled slightly and a hand appeared, grabbed his sleeve and pulled him through. More unfeasibly

ecstatic cheers erupted from an audience invisible beyond the barrage of spotlights. But the Doctor could *feel* their hungry

eyes. Meanwhile, he was being back-slapped by two vaguely familiar figures.

ERIC

***(Raising his glasses and squinting)* Is this him?**

It is.

ERIC

The Doctor?

URN

Yes.

ERIC

Get away!

ERN

Yes.

ERIC

Dressed like that? He's not a doctor!

The Doctor smoothed down his kaleidoscopically coloured coat. 'I most certainly am,' he insisted.

ERIC

***(Leans in close)* You want Shepherd's Bush Green,**

sunshine. Just up the road. You can't miss the Big Top.

ERN

He is the Doctor.

ERIC

Prove it! Show us your stethoscope!

`Not that sort of doctor!' snapped the Doctor.

ERN

Nol He saves the world!

ERIC

Yes?

ERN

From alien invasions.

`Well, I try,' smiled the Doctor modestly. 'Unwarranted encroachments on undefended planets, mad scientists with

delusions of galactic domination, disruptions to the Time/Space continuum. That sort of thing.'

ERN

Every Saturday afternoon.

ERIC

What? After the football?

ERN

Yes.

ERIC

Oh. ***(Exchanges a perplexed glance with ERN)*** **Time**

travel...

ERN

Yes.

ERIC

I wish you'd told me that earlier. I could've had

twenty quid on the winner of the 2.30 at Chepstow. ERN

Sorry.

The Doctor shook his head. 'I'm afraid it doesn't work like that. Besides which, I can't find my TARDIS.'

ERIC

That's what they all say.

ERN

Doctor, we have a surprise for you.

5051

`Really? I'm not on This is Your Life, am I? Only I've had quite a few already.' ERIC

(In ERN'S ear) **Told you.**

Reeks like a brewery.

Ì meant lives!' protested the Doctor.

ERN

No, no. We have been asked to present you with a

special award.

Àn award?' Startled, the Doctor began to straighten his waistcoat. 'Well, naturally I am extremely honoured at such

recognition.' He began to compose a mental list of people he should thank, but the only name that came to mind was his

own.

ERN

Have you got it?

ERIC

***(Leaping sideways)* Get off!**

ERN

The award.

ERIC

Oh. *(Calling offstage)* Could we have the award

please?

A glittering figure appeared carrying a silver plate. The Doctor eyed her warily. She resembled a Cyberman with an

ostrich feather headdress and a spangled, but skimpy, containment suit.

ERN

Doctor, after so many years of unstinting service,

please accept this award as a special token of appreciation on the occasion of your

retirement.

A round of applause from the audience.

The Doctor spluttered. 'My what?' The cold sweat broke out again. He felt the scrutiny of the eyes again: a viewing

audience incapable of understanding his inner turmoil.

ERN

Your retirement.

'I heard you the first time!' It was a word the Doctor had never ever considered. A word for exhausted executives,

worn-out workers and gangland gunmen. He stepped slowly backwards and looked at the two figures side on. Impossible and

invisible. As flat as images on a screen. He stepped smartly back again.

(Takes the plate from the Cyberhostess, who

simpers* in a *post-modern, non-emotive sort of way.

***He shakes the DOCTOR'S hand firmly)* There**

you are. Thank you very much. Lovely to meet you.

Now clear off. *(Turning to go)* What a lovely fella.

Swift half in the bar?

(Pulling him back)* Hang on. Hang on! *(To the

The Doctor studied the very flat, silver plate. On the rim, an engraved name had been clumsily scratched out. It looked

a little like Des Nimon. Above it was an inscription wishing the Doctor 'Good Luck in Your New Career!' It was written in

felt-tip and smudged when he fingered it.

ERIC

***(Confiding)* Do yourself a favour. Better to go**

quietly *(He jumps with a start, as if he's been pinched on the behind)* Hey! (— *and stares*

round accusingly at the blank-faced Cyberhostess)

`Quietly?' The Doctor's indignation tested its bounds and found none at all. `Quietly!' How absurd. Here he was in the

prime of this particular life... `QUIETLY! Well, we'll soon see about that!'

He'd had enough of these two. He wanted his TARDIS back. He grappled with the curtains, realising that the paucity

of two dimensions was only noticeable ifyou concentrated. Much easier to be beguiled by the false images. Better not to

think at all. Eventually he found the gap and left the stage with what dignity was left him.

But the empty studio was gone. He was standing in a cloistered chapel. Light streamed through the coloured glass

and somewhere an organ was playing.

On a wall, a poster in gothic script announced 'You Don't Have To Be Religious To Work Here, But It Helps'.

He heard a titter of audience laughter and then footsteps. From behind a pillar, painted like stone and propped at the

back by a wooden strut, he saw two monks in brown habits advancing up the aisle, their hands together in a devout

attitude of prayer. Halos of light hovered above their tonsured heads. To the Doctor's dismay, he saw that it was Eric and

Em again. They halted in front of the pews and faced the choir stalls. Beaming reverently, they reached *up,* removed their

halos and took turns playing hoopla with a *single* candlestick near the altar as target. Their scores automatically

clacked up on the hymn boards, which the audience took to be hilarious.

A sudden peal of church bells echoed out like an ecclesiastical alarm. The Doctor ducked down and started to crawl

along the painted floor, aware that the Eric and Em monks had turned from their game and were scrutinising the chapel.

He lay flat under one of the pew seats. Through the bells, he could hear them padding closer up the aisle. A sandaled

foot stopped inches from his nose. Its toe tapped a couple of times.

ERN

***(Sing-song)* Doctor? We only want to help you.**

ERIC

Who are we after?

ERN

The Doctor.

ERIC

Why? How much does he owe you?

ERN

He's in here somewhere. ***(Pause)*** **Don't do that?**

ERIC

What?

ERN

Nasty habit.

ERIC

(Taking umbridge) **You're wearing one too.**

The foot moved off again. The bells had finally gone quiet, but the Doctor waited, listening for any indication of where

his pursuers might be. He had heard nothing for a full minute and was just starting to raise his head above the seat when

there was a crash. The Eric monk had jumped clean on top of a pew and was leaping from one to the next, scattering

prayer books, casting back and forth as he came closer.

The Doctor snatched up a copy of Hymns Ancient and Modern and slung it sideways up the aisle. It thunked down by the

font. Immediately both monks were after it and the Doctor was scrambling off in the opposite direction.

As he reached a doorway marked 'Rectory Enquiries', a white halo sliced through the air past him. It took the eagle

head on the brass lectern next to him clean off. With a clack, the hymn board registered an extra twenty points.

ERIC and ERN One hundred and eighty!

The Doctor heard the flutter of invisible pages turning in invisible hymnals. As he barrelled through the door, an organ

started up and the invisible congregation launched into Hark, *the* Herald Angels Sing. The door slammed shut behind

him and it was quiet. He was faced by a curtain of silver tinsel like frozen torrent.

He would have paused to draw breath, but the heavy handle on the door clanked and turned. Without waiting, he dived

for cover through the glittering cataract and emerged into a dingy waiting room with low tables and armchairs. A sort

of heartless holding zone marked 'HOSPITALITY'.

'Good evening,' said a woman's voice, at once stately and slightly regal. `Do let me help you.'

The Doctor recognised those tones at once. A smartly dressed lady of a certain age was eyeing him with a cold curiosity.

She had a sweep of auburn hair so rigid that the wind would probably sing through it. Her twinset was blue, a cobalt blue

likely to thrill any excitable Geiger counter.

`No. No, I'm fine,' he replied, slightly flustered to be in such sudden and prestigious company, whilst spluttering bits of

tinsel from his mouth. 'I am She Doctor and they've stolen my TARDIS.'

Ànd I am the Prime Minister,' she said unfazed. 'How distressing to have had something stolen. The increase in car theft

figures has become a cause for concern lately, which is why my government is investing an extra fifty million pounds in the

police force. I hope

you've reported the theft.'

The Doctor smiled. 'Well, not yet exactly.'

'Oh, but my dear, you must,' she said and gently touched his arm. 'We'll have a word with the Home Secretary for you.'

'Well, thank you.' But he was hardly reassured. 'It's my TARDIS, you see...' Her eyes narrowed and her voice

hardened. She clutched at her black handbag. `TARDIS? Is that a foreign car?'

`Good grief, no!' the Doctor said quickly. 'It's British through and through!' He'd heard rumours that this Prime

Minister could wield her handbag the way a medieval knight wielded a mace.

`Quite right.' Her voice had softened again. `TAR-DIS... That must be one of the new independent manufacturers. We

always try to encourage such admirable enterprise.' There was a moment's pause while she waited for something to

happen. 'Well, it's been delightful to meet you. I'm sure someone here can arrange for you to get to your fancy-dress

party.'

The Doctor pulled at his lapels with irritation. 'There are places, Prime Minister, where these clothes are considered

the height of sartorial elegance.'

`But hardly clubbable,' she ventured and held him with a stare so gracious that he almost felt he was being pitied.

He leaned round to look at her side-on... and her profile didn't disappear. Unsure whether to be encouraged or alarmed,

he asked, 'Prime Minister, what are you doing in this place?'

`Television Centre...?' Her smile froze as she confided, 'My husband says the place is full of commies. But one gathers

that ordinary people consider this sort of thing amusing. It's considered an honour to appear.'

Àh,' he intoned, the invidious need for publicity.'

Òh, yes. We must stay in touch, mustn't we?' She angled her foot, twisting it back and forth, as if her black shoes were

uncomfortable. They were heavy with clunkily stacked heels. 'And, of course, Christmas is so important for families.'

The Doctor shuddered. 'Christmas. The ancient season of Misrule, the darkest moment of the year when anything can

happen.' He edged back the curtain of tinsel and peered through.

The chapel was gone. In a tinsel-hung jungle clearing, a distinguished, grey-haired gentleman wearing a tuxedo and

baggy khaki shorts was being forced to perform a hat-and-cane dance routine with a family group of large and

pugnacious gorillas.

Òkay, Sir Dickie, could we take it from the high kicks again?' called a voice. Ì'm David,' said the zoologist wearily.

`Such indignity,' muttered the PM in the Doctor's ear, 'but it seems we must all do our bit.'

`Bananas!' One of the dancing gorillas was flouncing its arms. 'I don't peel my own bananas. I'm a star! Get me my

agent now!'

There was a fizz of lightning and thunder cracked. The gorilla was reduced to a pile of smoking ash. The Doctor closed

the tinsel quickly. 'Who's in charge here? Do you know who's running all this?'

The PM was busy counting to herself and marking out movements with her foot. 'I'll be so glad when we're over the

election.'

`But who's in control?'

Her face could have stopped a clock. 'We... that is I am in charge.'

`This place! Not the country!'

A voice crackled from the tannoy. 'Prime Minister? Please stand by for your entrance.'

`Do excuse me, my dear,' she *said.* 'Let's see the Labour Party out-vote me *after* this!'

ERN

***(Beyond the curtains)* Ladies and Gentlemen. We**

are honoured to have a very special Christmas guest with us tonight.

ERIC

Do we have to kneel?

ERN

Get up! Ladies and gentlemen. Please welcome... the

Prime Minister!

AMC

Your Majesty!

ERN

Get up!

With a burst of big band music, the PM dissolved through the tinsel curtain *in* a barrage of applause. The Doctor held

back, reluctant to follow. An overhead monitor suddenly flared into life. The Prime Minister of Great Britain, still

armed with her handbag, and flanked by Em and Eric, was tap

dancing with vigour and considerable skill.

A miasma of gloom settled over the Doctor. Was this the stuff of retirement? Would he be reduced to guest

appearances on other people's shows? How soon before networked TV shows became village fetes? He had Seven more

lives to live! How would the universe fare if he spent them consigned to an old folk's home?

On the monitor, the PM was into her solo. Music, light and laughter suddenly filled the empty room. Hands

clamped down on the Doctor's shoulder.

ERN

Welcome to the party, Doctor.

ERIC

Everyone's been dying to meet you.

A sea of withered faces turned to look as they entered. Faces the Doctor recognised, or hadn't seen for years, or had

forgotten. All of them belonging In some subterranean vault of British television history.

PARTY GUESTS Darling! How wonderful! Ooh, you are awful, but I like you!

And then they turned back to themselves, giggling and grimacing, smirking at the Doctor's technicolour trench coat.

The room and its celebrities seemed to stretch for ever. Some immortal, some wiped away forever like tears or tape.

Some still active, like nuclear

reactors or yoghurt, hardly noticing the road to ruin they travelled. And all of them as thin as two-dimensional wafers.

Close by, a familiar-faced woman in a very low-cut dress, was manically arranging vowels and consonants with one

hand, and waving home-loan leaflets with the other. Her left foot was doing quadratic equations, while she was running a

marathon with her right. And playing the harmonica.

`Good evening,' called the Doctor, unsure if he knew her or had just seen her on TV.

ERIC

Don't distract Carol. If she stops, the whole of

Wigan goes dark.

The Doctor nodded. 'Versatile.' ERN

No. Vaudeville.

Every man's head turned. Through the crowd floated a raven-haired diva in a designer frock and chef's hat. In her hand,

she carried a bag of chips.

KITCHEN DIVA *(Licking her fingers very slowly)* Raspberry coulis on the chips with just a smidgin of freshly

ground cardamom. The kids adore it. Oops...

She had spilled the fruit down her décolletage, but wasted no time distributing long-handled ice cream spoons to

the immediate gathering.

ERIC

***(Scow l)* Typica l that . Em h ere was a domestic**

goddess before she could even sun dry a rusk!

They both suddenly ducked.

ERIC

Look out! Fashion police!

ERN

Now we're for it! Get down, Doctor!

The crowd parted, but the Doctor stood his ground as the two haute couture harpies slowly advanced on their latest victim.

Tongues as sharp as scissors, eager for sacrificial blood. The entire company held its breath as they circled their prey.

HARPY 1

Red tartan and yellow stripes. Green loafers. And

the polka dot cravat. Mmm...

HARPY 2

God, how amazing. It's really you, darling. Love

those clashes.

HARPY 1

Lov57

e it all!

TOGETHER

Where can we get copies?

On a perch, sat an aged grey parrot, its face wizened, eyes bulging and beak dwarfing its face.

PARROT

Give us a twirl. Give us a twirl. Awkl

The Doctor felt a chill of horror. 'This place? Are we in Hell?'

ERN

It's where al celebrities go in the end. When their

time comes. We look after them.

RIC

No one else'll have them.

'Retirement?' intoned the Doctor. 'Is this my fate too? I demand to

see the Controller!' And on the screen, the PM was still

dancing.

SRN

We've a surprise for you.

URIC

Ern's written a play.

The Doctor groaned. 'I wondered when you'd get round to that.'

ERN

***(Proudly)* It's special. A personal tribute.**

"SIC

Nearly fifteen minutes, it took him.

The Doctor sighed and brushed at his coat. This was the end of the road. He was born to be a hero, but was seen as a

clown. Aspiration turned to tesignation. He couldn't let down his hosts. Doomed to his fate, he mumbled, 'Oh, all right.

What is it then?'

PARROT

***(Mighty squawk)* Whoa! Didn't he do well!**

***ERN* and ERIC Oh, shut up!**

IMPS Play. Scene 1. A Barren Rocky Planet: re-use set from RT Anniversary Special Cover (Stock) Night.

A distant world on the edge of space. The DOCTOR and the PM enter and look about.

PM

W ha t a fo r s a ke n p la c e . R i p e f or co m m e r c i a l

development...

This is Telos, planet of my dreaded enemies, the

DOCTOR

Cybermen. Terrible creatures, Prime Minister.

Half man, half machine.

PM

You haven't met my cabinet!

DOCTOR

A n d I s t i l l h a v e n ' t f o u n d m y s t o l e n T A R D I S .

(Annoyed at having to say the line) **The ship wot I travel in.**

PM

Look! Two giant spaceships, heading this way.

Two spaceships hover across the sky. Halfway their strings get tangled. The Doctor looks around irritably.

ERIC and ERN, dressed in brown coats, lurk behind rocks, with fishing rods attached to the tangled spaceships.

ERIC

Sorry. ***(Pointing to the ships)*** **Could you possibly?**

ERN

Would you mind?

The DOCTOR and PM disentangle the fishing lines. The ships fly off.

ERN

Much obliged.

PM

(Pointing off) **Here come some of the constituents!**

A surprised ERIC, caught still putting his fishing rod away, stands

frozen with a silly smile. A long hook reaches on and pulls him off set.

DOCTOR

The Cybermen! All identical with their emotions

sur 58

gically removed.

PM

That's nationalisation for you.

The drums and trumpet Cyber theme. Two Cybermen appear: one short, the other tall with glasses. A cybermat

trundles after them on a lead.

CYBERIC

Afternoon. A lovely moonlit one. ***(He yanks a1 the***

l e a d) **D o n ' t d o t h a t . N a u g h t y b o y . I t ' s o n l y cardboard.**

CYBERN

You currently have three messages.

CYBERIC

(Releases a plastic cup from the side of his chest

unit) **Would you like a cup?** ***(He turns a tap on the unit and it pours*** **tea) Sugar?**

CYBERN

Please speak after the tone.

The Doctor finally lost patience. 'No. I'm sorry. You're sending it up. Science fiction is serious stuff It has to be played

straight. You've even got me and the Prime Minister talking in script form.'

PM

(Apologetically) **My dear, with a good team of**

writers. ***(She slowly turns side on to him)***

Òh, no,' he muttered, watching her flatten and dwindle to nothing. 'Not you too. You didn't have to sign the contract!'

ERN

(Taking off his cyberhelmet) **You're wrecking my**

play.

ERIC

Ern's right. He believed in what he wrote. That's a

work of art, that is.

Àrt?!' exploded the Doctor. 'The whole thing's a travesty. Just who is really in charge here?!'

There was a thunderous boom and a huge grey Head hovered before them, wreathed in coloured smoke. Its eyes

flickered like baleful torches.

CONTROLLER And a significant improvement on the endless dross that this so-called Time Lord appears

in. Look at him, dressed like a walking Christmas tree!

Everyone turned to look at the Doctor. His brow scrunched with rage. 'A lot of people enjoy that... dross!' He jabbed a

finger at the Head. 'Did you ask the audience?'

CONTROLLER Why should I? I'm in charge. I know best! Let's be rid of him!

Something gleamed and winked in the air. An axe flew straight at the Doctor's head. It froze with millimetres to spare,

giving his hair an unlikely new parting, before dissolving into nothing.

CONTROLLER ERIC

What's this? What happened!

ERN ERIC SRN

Excuse us. Could we have a word?

CONTROLLER ERIC

We're masters of time too, you know.

SRN

***(Pulling him aside)* Timing. Masters of timing. Not now!**

Interferers!

***(Raising a fist)* Listen, mush, we can make time fly, or drag it into eternity.**

So just be nice...

The

PIR's Head splutters in

rage.

CON7'ROLL

You see, lots of people out there like the Doctor.

IRIC

And he makes a lot of money

BEN

tCONTROLLERERIC EERNERICands

1111RI

these things.

So seeing as it's Christmas, couldn't you just...

C

give him his TARDIS back?

ERN

GO**The band struck up. Down a sudden staircase trooped a procession of plumed**

Cyberhostesses, sequinned arms flung wide. And the Doctor began to dance,

he couldn't stop himself, tapping the floor in increasing flights of Terpsichorean fantasy. He was Astaire and

Fonteyn and Pan's People in one, on and on until his shoes began to smoke. And above him, the Head laughed and

laughed in its triumph.

CONTROLLER Happy Christmas, Doctor. This is real entertainment! Instantly gratifying!

AUDIENCE

Behind you.

CONTROLLER Oh, shut up! AUDIENCE B e h i n d y o u !

CONTROLLER

What?

PM

Just hold on one moment!

The Prime Minister slid back into existence, advancing with handbag raised, past the dancing Doctor towards the Head.

`No! Over there!' called the Doctor in mid-entrechat, pointing towards the tinsel curtain in the corner. Following his

finger, the two-dimensional Dea ex Machina approached the curtain and tore it open. The audience gasped. A figure was

revealed, crouched over his desk. It was the man from the TV shop. The Doctor tumbled to the floor and lay panting as the

huge Head above him dissolved in its own fumes.

PM

T h i s i s n ' t i n y o u r C h a r t e r , y o u g r o v e l l i n g

impresario! Try to flatten me! I'll flatten you first!

She swung her bag onto the Controller's Head.

CONTROLLER ***(Coughing through the smoke. Face blackened. Hair on end)*** **But, Ma'am. My job...**

PM

Extraordinary. Just like my handbag!

PM

You're not in charge here! This is public service

broadcasting... for the public. Not just for you!

`Prime Minister!' yelled the Doctor. ***'My*** **TARDIS... I need it.'**

CONTROLLER Never! I've hidden his ship where he'll never find it!

The audience started to boo.

PM

What does it look like?

The Doctor shuffled awkwardly. 'Well, it's like a police box. Bigger inside than out.'

61

She unclasped the black bag and rummaged inside. The reticule's mouth

gaped wider and wider until, amongst the shower of cosmetics, memos,

knuckle-dusters and talc, out tumbled the massive blue shape of a police box.

`My TARDIS!' The Doctor stumbled to his ship and clung to it like a rescued mariner. The key was still in the door.

The Controller, hopping with rage, spun round on the Prime Minister. 'It's all ruined! I'd have got away with it if it

wasn't for that pesky Time Lord!'

The Doctor raised his head in disbelief. 'What's the matter with you? Why do you hate me so much?'

PM CONTROLLER

(Interrupting) **Why does he hate you? That's simple. No! You promised.**

We all know, sunshine.

RIC CONTROLLER

You can't!

RN

When he was little, his family made him watch you, Doctor.

When he really wanted to watch...

PM CONTROLLER ERIC

Buck Rogers! **I wanted to watch *Buck Rogers!* You told me it was *Metal Mickey.***

CONTROLLER

Shut up! Shut up!!

The Doctor stared at the cowering figure. 'And all that hate came because of that?'

CONTROLLER *(Wheedling)* You won't tell, will you? 'It's just a secret, between you and us. We

promise.'

CONTROLLER Bet you will. AUDIENCE Oh, no, we won't.

'You see,' smiled the Doctor. 'Nothing to worry about.'

CONTROLLER *(Slyly)* Well... In that case. A reprieve. Of course.

A big cheer all round. The Prime Minister produced a plate of fairy cakes from her handbag, Eric served teas from his

chest unit, and everyone slapped the Doctor on the back as heartily as their two dimensions would allow.

CONTROLLER One concession though, Doctor. I'm giving you a new p r e m is e s - a n ic e lit t le v en u e . Yo u 'll lov e

it. Midweek in a prime time situation. *(And the smile came back into his voice)* On the

junction, just opposite Coronation Street. Happy Christmas, Doctor. And many more of

them!

The Doctor awoke with a start, spilling Mrs Beeton's vintage mince pies across the TARDIS floor. The TV screen

glowered blankly at him like a bad dream, so he glowered back. 'Television! It always ruins Christmas! But I'll never let it

ruin my life!' And he opened the TARDIS door, heaved the infernal device across the console room and booted it out into the

night.

Across the fairy-lit wasteland of Shepherd's Bush Green echoed the sound of someone laughing.

Christmas, worn out like last year's toys, shuddered a little.

Never Seen Cairo

Darren Sellars

The crumpled envelope in Mary's hands felt heavy.

She turned it over and over, staring blankly at the small, folded, yellowing paper, her eyes red from tears. She was sat by

the window where she had spent almost every day for the past year, limp in the chair since receiving the letter. The sky

through the window outside was dark with the promise of snow.

'I'm sorry,' she stumbled, looking up at the visitor. 'It's been almost a year since I was informed of Edward's death, and

the last thing I expected was to receive word from him at this late date. May I ask how you came by this?'

À... friend of Edward's found it shortly after he died,' the man said, his words hardly registering to Mary. 'It was on

Edward's cot, waiting to be collected. He thought that you should have it.'

Mary sat there, mouth agape, struggling to take it all in. The package nestled beneath her fingers, calling out to be

read.

`Please, read it if you wish,' the visitor urged.

She tried to respond, but found the words would not come, her throat choked by the importance of what she now

held in her hands. Then her fingers tore at the seal.

Shutting everything outside the letter from her world, she began to read...

The gathered soldiers from either side had formed a temporary pitch, placing helmets as goalposts and clearing as much

space as possible in the area where only hours earlier their dead comrades' bodies had laid. The numbers of people on

the opposing teams were woefully mismatched, but no one cared.

Edward Woodbourne was cold. He wrapped his arms as tightly around himself as he could in an effort to keep warm.

The pain from the injury caused by the falling crate had eased, now replaced by a dull throbbing sensation. He looked at the

officer next to him. The Doctor — as he had referred to himself— showed no sign of suffering from the low temperatures,

despite his only apparel being khaki uniform trousers and an off-white shirt. A youngish fair-haired man, he had been

found not far from No Man's Land, staggering across the outlying supply lines, although later he had stated that he had been

investigating a cathe 63

64

dral in Amiens; a good twenty miles away at least. Symptoms of shellshock, Edward had surmised.

Covered in a combination of dirt and blood, noticeably distressed, he had been calling for someone called Peri.

Perpugilliam: the odd name was, as it turned out, his assistant's. His panic had only subsided when informed that

the young girl had been found safe and sound and was waiting at the C.C.S., and that a transport was already on its way

to collect him and take him to her. The young officer became remarkably lucid after this information had been revealed,

relaxing visibly, and during the hour or so they had sat in the A.P. tent together talking since, they had become good

friends, in the way one did out here, all or nothing in just a few hours.

That was when they had heard the singing.

Cleared by the A.P. officer to leave until the Doctor's transport had arrived, both men had left the tent to find the

fighting had, miraculously, ceased. Apparently a truce had been declared while Edward had been out of action, started

when the German soldiers had been heard singing carols in their trench. Even now it flickered with the lights of dozens of

tiny Christmas trees breaking up the dusk haze at regular intervals along the trench. Events had continued apace since

then, eventually leading to the football match that was just about to commence before them as they stood on the sidelines

of the makeshift pitch.

Edward watched as two German soldiers approached. He had never seen that uniform at such close quarters. They looked

civilised enough to him now, as they always had, though the newspapers from home always portrayed them as semi-human

barbarians. Whispering between themselves, they looked at the Doctor, measuring him up as they removed their helmets,

placing them on the ground next to the two observers.

***Wie wehre es mit einem* Spiel Tommy? Machst du mit?' one of them asked.**

The Doctor gave a small apologetic smile. *'Nein danke Herr* Hauptgereiter, ich bin *eher ein* mann *des* crickets.'

One of the soldiers snorted. Àhh, Cricket! Sloth *Englander mit deisem* cricket.' The Doctor's smile broadened as the two

soldiers walked away to join the rest of their comrades, laughing as they went.

`That must be a big advantage, sir, speaking German so well and all,' said Edward, fumbling in his pocket, before

locating what he was looking for. `Smoke?' he asked, proffering a tatty packet of cigarettes in the Doctor's face.

Èrm...' said the Doctor, an uncomfortable look on his face. 'No, thank you, Edward... Yes, I find knowing the language can

help a great deal in certain situations. Unfortunately though, no matter how much talking is involved, sometimes it isn't

enough.' He trailed off, staring into the distance.

Edward lit up his cigarette and stuffed the packet and matches back in his kitbag as he inhaled deeply, holding the

smoke in his lungs for several seconds before exhaling. The smoke twirled off into the night air before him. Àre you not

joining in, sir?'

`No, no. As I told the German officers, I'm more of a cricket man.'

`Yeah, I never played very much either. I always used to love going to watch the match, every Saturday I'd be there with

my friends... Loved it. I was hoping

to take Joshua one day, only I...' He broke off, sucking in another lungful of smoke to signify he wasn't about to say any

more.

`Well,' said the Doctor quickly, 'in my opinion, watching is infinitely more enjoyable than taking part. The men in the

thick of the action over there have no idea of the skill involved: all they can see are people charging at them. From here

you can see the players making forward runs, trying to breach the defences, and get some idea of the overall strategy.'

`True, sir,' said Edward, his eyes fixed on the ball in play, a warm smile on his face. Warm enough to take a risk for a

moment. 'But then, you would see it like that, wouldn't you, sir?'

To Edward's surprise, the Doctor smiled.

They talked as they watched the patterns of the match unfold themselves, first the British, then the Germans taking the

lead. The Doctor was certainly an odd chap, much more friendly than any of the officers who'd visited the trenches,

and he seemed quite content to listen to Edward without commenting, which was certainly not how officers usually

behaved. But the conversation thrilled Edward beyond any notions that he was mingling out of his class, that he could say

he'd passed the time of day with a gentleman. Edward hadn't felt this alive since before leaving England. He found

himself talking to the Doctor at great length about his life back home: about Mary, Joshua, even about his dull job at the

bank, and he felt his spirits soar just thinking about those things.

He looked up at the clear sky overhead, a myriad of small lights shining down from the heavens, and he felt at peace.

65

66

This was a far better Christmas present than any bonus ration pack from Princess Mary.

For the first time Edward had hope.

`Perpugilliam,' he said. 'Foreign is she, sir?'

Àh, yes! American as a matter of fact.'

`You travel a lot, do you, sir?'

`Yes,' replied the Doctor, hands sliding into his pockets. 'You could say that.'

Ì've always wanted to travel, said Edward, 'but never got round to it... never found the time, what with Mary and Joshua.

I've always wanted to visit Egypt myself. Mr Harry Burton is said

to be making great finds at the tombs, Rameses II and

such. Always been interested in the Egyptians, that kind of stuff. I've never seen Cairo... doubt I ever will now.' He

found that he'd punctuated the end of the sentence with a half-hearted laugh and felt a little ashamed of it.

The Doctor looked at him, and although he laughed along with him, Edward could see that the man was worried

somehow.

A small cheer emanated from the German troops as they scored their third goal of the match, but it went unnoticed by

both men.

`Have you ever been, sir?' Edward asked

`Yes.'

`Tell me... what's it like?'

Ìt's magnificent, Edward. It's one of the places on this Earth where you feel a genuine sense of awe. So much of it is still

waiting to be discovered. The people there embrace life in a way that would make a great many in the west envious, and

believe me, they have much to be envious about. Walking in the Valley of the Kings among the echoes of age-old empires:

one of the true wonders of this world! And there is simply nothing that compares to seeing the first rays of sunshine

silhouetting the great pyramid at Giza, at sunrise. Breathtaking. What would —' He was cut short as the ball bounced

between the pair of them, rolling to a stop just behind. A German soldier ran past them, picked the ball up and threw it

back into the match. 'What would you say if you had the chance to leave this place?'

Edward looked at him quizzically. 'What do you mean?'

`Supposing you had the chance to visit Egypt, to travel. To make discoveries of your own, to see things that you never

thought possible. To leave the battlefield and go in search of something greater, but to do it you had to leave tonight. Would

you take it?'

Edward looked at the ground for several moments. He found himself laughing. 'No,' he said finally, shaking his head.

The Doctor looked almost crestfallen.

Shouts of disappointment were heard from the throng of soldiers before them. A kick by a squaddie had sent the ball into

a bunch of barbed wire at the extremity of one of the trenches, bursting it, much to the dismay of the players. The owner

of the now useless ball endeavoured to remove it, and the rest of the soldiers began to sit down, to talk with each other, to

brew up.

Edward felt he should explain his answer. 'I'd leave here tomorrow, sir, if the war ended, and I wouldn't think twice

about it. But even though I hate being here, I have to stay, for Mary and Joshua. I have to fight this war in the hope that

they'll stay safe because of it. Them and the others like them. You weren't just asking me that to hear me say that, were

you, sir?'

`No, Edward, I wasn't testing you.'

`But I think we might all make it now. Especially now. It can't go back to how it was, not after this. It's like it really is

Christmas '

The Doctor smiled. 'Indeed.'

They stood there, silent for several moments, looking on at the group who were talking amongst themselves like old

friends, swapping mementos. Laughing together.

Through the crowd moved two higher-ranking soldiers. They stood on the very edge of the gathering, deep in

conversation, before the superior of the two looked in the Doctor and Edward's direction, pointing them out to his

subordinate. As the major stood observing the blatant fraternisation going on

between the British and German troops, the corporal made his way over to the Doctor, saluting him as he arrived.

Èxcuse me, sir?'

`Yes, Corporal?' breathed the Doctor, turning to face the newcomer.

`Your transport has arrived, sir. If you'd come with me we'll get you on your way.'

The Doctor opened his mouth to speak, but was interrupted as the nearby major barked orders at the English squaddies. 'Back

you go, back you go,' he ordered. `You're supposed to be killing the bloody Hun, not making friends with him!'

The Doctor sighed. 'Very well, Corporal.' He made to leave, then stopped and turned back. 'Goodbye, Edward,' he said.

'It was a pleasure to meet you. Merry Christmas.'

Edward shook his hand. 'You too, sir. Merry Christmas.'

`Please, Edward... not "sir". Doctor.'

`Very well... Doctor.'

Edward watched as the Doctor was led away through the dissipating crowd and down towards the A.P. dugout where

the transport would be waiting.

There were already the sounds of shouts, and scuffles, and

suddenly a shot behind him. Edward turned his head.

Hours later, Edward found himself once more squatting with some of his mates among the filth-encrusted water of the

trench. The ceasefire was meant to have ended, but the noises coming from over the top weren't the ones they'd all

grown accustomed to. British pistol fire, shouts in English and German replied to in English and German. There was a

small, stuttering rebellion going on out there, officers and sergeants coming from all over to try and force the men on

both sides to get back into their trenches. And at the same time, it sounded like those officers from both sides weren't

sure whether or not they should be firing on each other.

The sounds disconcerted Edward and the men he was with. Made them feel like traitors, or rebels in a rebellion that was

dying like a small fire in a high wind. That was what felt, now, like it would all be over soon. Not the greater world of mud

and water in which they now all lived again. But... but...

Pulling his rifle by his side, Edward closed his eyes. He rummaged in his pocket and pulled out the folded bits of paper he

had stuffed there earlier. He read through the words he had already written by the dim lamplight of a nearby dugout,

then found his pen in his kitbag and added to them.

. .tonight *given me* hope. I didn't think that was possible. Hope that by this time next year I'l be back home with you and *Joshua. Give*

him my *love* and *please* don't *be sad at* the lack of my *presence,* you always *have been* and always wil *be in* my thoughts. Until then, Merry Christmas, Mary, I'll *be* with you both soon.

***Forever* your loving husband, Edward**

*** * ***

Mary stared at the dried ink that was her dead husband's name.

It was several minutes before she composed herself enough to look at her visitor, a strange-looking short man with dark

tousled hair. He carried the oddest umbrella. 'I'm sorry,' she said. 'You must think me very rude to leave you standing

there in such a manner. Please do sit down.'

`No. Thank you for the offer. But I'm afraid I must be leaving now And you need to be alone. Thank you for your time.'

He made to leave and in that split second Mary caught a glimpse of death at his shoulder. She stood up, instinctively

going to him.

`You lost someone yourself, didn't you? In the war?'

He stopped for a moment in the doorway at her words and half turned back to face her. 'In a manner of speaking. And I

kept someone in the war. Far too long.'

And then she was alone once more.

She slumped back into the chair for what felt like an age, her mind racing, her eyes welling with tears. Finally, she

turned to the window, and raised the curtain a fraction to look at the world outside.

The day seemed brighter than it had before. Flakes of snow were beginning to fall, covering the street outside in a soft

white film. The visitor who only moments ago had been standing in her parlour strolled down the street away from her,

oblivious to the looks his strange attire was attracting from passers by. She watched him as he walked, and was overcome

by a sense of Warmth she hadn't known since before hearing of her husband's death. Edward was gone now, but he

hadn't died feeling hopeless and alone. And it was all due to the little man walking away down the street.

She had never

6

even t 8hanked him.

69

She looked skywards, at the snow drifting down in random patterns, thinking about how she would spend Christmas

with Joshua. And for the first time in what felt like forever, Mary smiled.

The Man Who (Nearly)

Killed Christmas

Mark Michalowski

Christmas is a magical season: a season when time does the strangest things. Sometimes it goes backwards, sometimes

sidewards. And sometimes it does the most amazing loop-the-loops and ends up right back where it started.

But sometimes it decides to play tricks. Why? Because... oh, because it can.

(Miss Bennett watched *the enthral ed faces of the* children *as* the little man's *eyes* swept across them. Despite her initial misgivings, it

***seemed* Miss Wright had *been* spot-on with *her* suggestion of this *strange* man as *a* Christmas storytel er for *her* classroom of jumpy, excited, pre-holiday eight-year-olds.)**

So, one Christmas Eve — when the world was cold and white and silent and all the children were in bed waiting for

Christmas Day — high above the world, above all the cities and villages and towns, Santa was flying through the sky in his

sleigh, pulled by his reindeer... Dancer and Prancer and, oh, you know their names.

Santa was wondering about whether he could manage another

mince pie and glass of sherry (and you all know it's just

as dangerous to drink and drive when you're at the reins of a sleigh as it is when you're driving a car) when, out of

absolutely nowhere, something appeared in the air, a tall, dark blue box, right in front of the sleigh. The noise it made was

an absolute racket: a trumpeting, groaning noise like the sky was tearing apart. Santa pulled back on the reins sharply,

but it was too late: the sleigh was travelling too fast and the box was too close. Santa screwed up his eyes, expecting, at any

moment, to feel the thud of his beloved reindeer galloping right into the thing. And then, suddenly, through his eyelids,

Santa saw bright light. He felt a gentle bump as the sleigh landed. Opening his eyes, he could hardly believe what he was

seeing: he was in a room, a brilliant, white room. Everything was white: the floor, the walls, the ceiling. The reindeer's

hooves made impatient clopping sounds on the floor.

But what was most amazing was that there was a man in the room, running around something that looked like a big, metal

mushroom. He was flicking switches and pressing buttons on it, as though his life depended on it.

Òh, dear me. Oh, my word, that was close!' said the man, looking up at Santa and twinkling a twinkly smile.

Santa looked around, wondering where on Earth he was. He couldn't be inside the box: it had been much too small.

`Where am I?' asked Santa in amazement. Cautiously, he climbed out of the sleigh and patted the flanks of the nearest

reindeer, hoping to reassure it. But he was surprised to find that none of the animals seemed put out: they stood, shuffling

on their hooves, sniffing the air.

`You probably don't remember me,' said the man, striding forwards to shake Santa's hand. 'I visited you once before,

a long, long time ago. I came with two young friends of mine, John and Gillian.'

Santa scratched his snowy beard: the names had a familiar ring to them.

Ì'm the Doctor,' he said at last, when Santa finally shook his head.

Àaah,' said Santa, the memories coming back to him. 'Yes! But... but you were an old man, then, weren't you?' The man

before him, whilst certainly not young, was most definitely not the white-haired old man he remembered. He had an unruly

shock of dark hair and an oddly lugubrious face, quite at odds with the brightness of his eyes. The man smiled.

`Yes, yes, I was. But, as you can see, now I'm not.'

Santa scratched his beard again, wondering whether he should believe him or not. He looked around.

`So what's all this about, Doctor? I am rather busy, as you can imagine. I have toys to deliver, you know.'

The little man's face darkened and he pursed his lips.

`That's what I have to talk to you about, Santa. I'm sorry to have hijacked you like this, but I'm afraid I have something

rather disturbing to show you.' Will it take long?'

`Time,' said the Doctor, taking Santa's elbow and leading him towards a door at the other side of the room, 'is relative.

We have exactly as long as it will take.'

`Take to what?' Santa was feeling slightly annoyed now: he had work to do, and there was no time to be shilly-shallying

around.

`To show you the future.'

Santa gasped and staggered backwards into the Doctor.

Ìt's impossible!' he said in a whisper.

The Doctor had led him down corridor after corridor in this white, clean place of his, which, he had reminded him,

was a space and time machine. Finally, they had arrived at a small, wooden door with a brass-ringed porthole in the centre

of it. After peering through and nodding, the Doctor opened the door and ushered Santa inside.

Inside, was nothing.

Well, not nothing, thought Santa, trying to stop himself from panicking Inside, was everything. The whole of space —

galaxies, stars and probably planets too — floated there in a room with no walls. He looked down, and saw

that he was standing on a small mat, just inside the door. On the mat was written the word 'WELCOME' in big, black

letters.

`What is this?'

`This is my universatorium,' said the Doctor with some pride. 'It's not real. Well, at least I don't think it's real. It's just

a projection, like a planetarium, but better. And bigger.'

`Why are you showing me this? And why now, of all times?'

The man rubbed his hands together awkwardly. 'Because I want you to stop.'

`Stop what?'

`Stop everything! Stop all the delivering, all the toy-making, all the coming down chimneys in the middle of the night! All

of it.'

Santa was staggered. He looked the Doctor up and down, standing, it seemed, on nothing but empty space, whilst all

around him the vast galaxies wheeled and spun.

Tut why?'

The Doctor didn't answer. Instead, he turned to face the universe and did some funny hand-wavey movements. Santa

wobbled on his feet and reached back to grip the doorframe behind him, steadying himself as everything rushed

towards him, zooming in on one particular galaxy; and then on, on, down to one particular star; and still further, until

one particular planet gleamed beneath their feet, a particularly beautiful blue, brown and white planet.

`That's the Earth,' said Santa.

The Doctor nodded. 'Population, oh, about six and a half billion, give or take, with around two billion children.'

Santa was taken aback.

Ìs it really that many' Goodness me! I had no idea!'

Ànd at the moment, you take a whole year to do one night's work, don't you? You have a rather shoddy temporal

wormhole generator, don't you?' (A wormhole is a special tunnel that can take you to any place and any time, anywhere in

the universe... and sometimes out of it!) 'Don't try to deny it: my instruments picked up its space-time signature. You — and

those clones of yourself that you keep so very quiet about — use the wormholes to loop back in time, don't you, over and over

again, every day for a whole year, repeatedly revisiting Christmas Eve?'

Santa frowned. No one was supposed to know about Santa's little secrets, how he managed to deliver toys and presents

to every child in the world, all in the space of one night. 'So what if I do? How else am I going to keep all the Children

happy?'

Ìndeed, indeed,' murmured the Doctor regretfully. Tut you see, there is a problem.'

`There is?'

`Have you thought about what's going to happen in the future?' Santa narrowed his eyes. 'What d'you mean?'

The Doctor turned back to the image of the Earth, slowly rotating beneath their feet, and wiggled his hands again. The

image seemed to speed up, the patterns of clouds and storms and hurricanes on the Earth became jerky, stuttering and

shuddering around the planet.

Santa looked on in 72

disbelief as the Doctor fast-forwarded the universe around them. As the years sped by, he pointed

out the tiny flecks of light that were spaceships, leaving Earth in search of new worlds, new homes for humanity. At first

there was just a trickle, but rapidly it spread, becoming a haze of sparkling points, radiating out from the Earth in waves.

The Doctor expanded the view, zooming out from the Earth to show humanity's colonies, the planets on which they

settled, each one, in time, seeding still more colonies.

Ùnstoppable,' whispered the Doctor, although Santa wasn't sure whether there was admiration or regret in the little

man's voice. 'The human spirit is indomitable, don't you think?'

Santa could think of nothing to say as he watched.

Ànd now,' said the Doctor, 'how many people — how many children — do you think there are? Go on, have a guess!'

But Santa couldn't. He had no idea. 'Hundreds of billions? I don't know.'

Ìn just a few hundred years, once humanity has discovered space travel, there will be billions of billions. As many

human children in the galaxy as there are grains of sand on all the beaches on Earth. And more.'

Santa gave a little groan. He could *see* where this was going.

`You see the problem, don't you?' said the Doctor, pausing the universe around them and turning to him. His eyes

were filled with a strange sadness.

`But how...?' began Santa, before realising he didn't know how to finish the question.

`How will you do it?' the Doctor completed the thought. 'Is that what you're wondering?'

Santa nodded mutely.

They were on the surface of a planet. Above them, the sky was thick with oily smoke. There were no stars, no moons, just

an unending pall of greasy blackness, stretching from horizon to horizon. And, stretching between the same horizons, as

far as the eye could see, were factories. Dark, grim buildings, reaching up their dark, grim fingers to the sky as they

belched out a hundred, a thousand plumes of smoke. Tiny lights sparkled desperately in the midst of all that darkness.

The only sound was a relentless, mechanical grinding, as though the planet itself were made of rusty clockwork, ticking its

way desperately towards the end of time.

`This is Polaria,' said the Doctor. 'Well, to be exact, this is Polaria 271.'

Ànd there are another two hundred and seventy of them?'

Àctually,' said the Doctor, 'there are another two thousand eight hundred and nine of them. But as far as the billions of

children across the galaxy are concerned, there's just the one: Polaria, Santa's World, where he and the elves make all the

toys. Shall we have a closer look?'

`Do we have to?' Santa didn't like this planet, this mechanical hell.

They wandered through a vast, steel door and paused. The inside of the building was like a huge aircraft hanger: dim

lights hung from the impossibly distant ceiling on impossibly long wires, illuminating impossibly long benches at which

thin, tired-looking elves toiled. Massive conveyor belts clunked and clanked everywhere, moving toys and games and all

the things that children liked, whilst the elves fiddled with them, adding a little bit here and a little bit there.

`This,' whispered Santa, his throat drying up as he spoke. 'This is horrible.' 'It is, isn't it? And this isn't the worst of it.'

And suddenly, they were back in the middle of the universe, and Santa staggered.

The Doctor took his elbow and pointed out into space. 'You see those faint patches, like tiny clouds?'

Santa squinted until he could see them: vague, hazy patches, stretched out into lines and smears, like the trails from

airplanes.

`What are they?'

`They're holes,' said the Doctor. 'Holes in space.'

Santa frowned. 'I don't understand.'

Àt the moment, you manage to get around the world with the aid of your time-travelling wormholes. In the future — this

future — you have to make even more of them. More Santa clones, hundreds of thousands of them. It wasn't too bad when

you were just delivering to the children on Earth... but now...' He shook his head regretfully. 'Your wormholes were never

very good ones at the best of times. But now they're damaging the very fabric of space and time. The universe is falling

apart.'

Santa's shoulders sagged even more.

`That's why,' said 7

th 34e Doctor, 'I'm going to take over.'

Suzie and Timmy couldn't sleep. Of course they couldn't: it was Christmas Eve. Mummy and Daddy had gone to bed

an hour or so ago, and now the house was silent and still.

`What time does he come?' asked Suzie for the tenth time.

`Three o'clock,' said Timmy. 'I told you.'

`What time is it now?'

Timmy checked the clock beside his bed. 'Ten past two.'

He heard Suzie sigh in her bed on the other side of the room.

Suddenly, there was a loud bump from the ceiling.

`He's here!' hissed Suzie, leaping out of bed and running to the window. She stared up into the night sky as her brother

joined her, looking for signs of Santa and his sleigh.

Then there was another bump, and a sudden, scary, scraping noise, as though something huge were slithering down

the roof. A big, square shadow fell past the window and Suzie jumped back in alarm.

`Santa's fallen off the roof!' she wailed.

`Don't be stupid,' said Timmy, putting his slippers on. 'Come on!' Nervously, Suzie shrugged herself into her

dressing gown, and the two of

them tiptoed silently out onto the landing and down the stairs. They paused

in the hallway as they heard the sound of the doorknob being turned.

`Hide behind the Christmas tree,' hissed Timmy, pushing his little sister

into the living room. 'If he sees you, he won't leave you any presents.' `But why's he coming through the —'

`Sssh!`

They managed to hide just in time. Crouching behind the tree, their hearts hammering in their chests, they watched the

door.

`That's not —'

Timmy clamped his hand over his sister's mouth as a strange little man in a baggy black jacket peered around the

door. His eyes alighted on the mince pie and glass of sherry that Timmy and Suzie had made Mummy put out for Santa.

He took a bite of the mince pie and a sip of the sherry before reaching into his pocket and pulling out a little box with

twinkly lights on its dark surface. He placed it on the table. After a bit more rooting around in his pockets, he found a

short, fat, rubbery snakelike thing.

Timmy heard Suzie make an èww' noise. And before Timmy could stop her, she'd stood bolt upright and said: 'You're

not Santa! What have you done with him?'

The man jumped. 'Santa has, erm... asked me to help him,' he said, looking a bit awkward, a bit guilty.

Timmy stood up and took hold of his sister's hand. Mummy and Daddy had warned them about talking to strangers.

`Why?' asked Suzie boldly.

`Because he's very busy. He has hundreds of children to take presents to, and he needs a hand.'

Àre you an elf?' asked Suzie, stepping out from behind the Christmas tree, and eyeing up the box and the snake-thing

on the table.

`Not really,' said the man. 'Just think of me as Santa's friend.' He smiled, but Timmy wasn't convinced.

`So where's your sack, then?' he asked.

Ì don't need a sack,' said the man. 'I've got magic pockets. Look!'

And he reached into his jacket and pulled out a huge, huge bunch of flowers. Suzie's mouth dropped open. Timmy

wasn't impressed.

Ànyone can do that,' he said scornfully.

Òh,' said the man. 'Well, then what about this...?' He pulled out a wooden stick from his jacket, put it to his lips, and

began to play a horrible tune. `What's that?' asked Timmy.

Òh dear,' said the man a little sadly, returning the stick to his pocket. 'I suppose you want ghetto blasters and

computer games, don't you?' He said the words as if they tasted nasty.

`Yeah!' said Timmy, and Suzie giggled and clapped her hands together. `Well, wouldn't you rather have something

very, very special?' The man crouched down, the rubber snake-thing in his hand.

`What's that?' ask 7

ed5 Suzie as the man cupped it in his hands. It wriggled and writhed.

`This is a noolid, a telepathic translator. It'll let you speak to dozens of different species of lifeforms. Wouldn't that be

fun?'

Timmy glanced at Suzie, who looked less than convinced.

`Can I talk to Trixie?'

`Trixie's our cat,' explained Timmy, as the man placed the noolid on the table where it continued to wriggle around.

Àhhh... no, I'm afraid it only works with fairly intelligent species.' The man looked a bit crestfallen. But then he

remembered the box with the lights, and held it out to them.

Ìs it a computer game?' asked Timmy.

Umm... not really. It detects etheric stresses.'

`What?'

`Stresses in the ether.' He paused and looked at them. 'This isn't really what you were hoping for, is it?'

Timmy shook his head.

`Well how about this?' The man dug around in his pockets and pulled out a crumpled paper bag. He peered into it,

dubiously. 'Been quite a while since I had one of these, but I'm sure they're all right.' He held it out to them, and Timmy

and Suzie tried to see what was in it. It looked like sweets.

`Mummy and Daddy told us never to accept sweets from strangers,' said Suzie wisely.

Ì'm not really a stranger!' protested the man. 'And these are very special sweets. I'm sure Mummy and Daddy

wouldn't mind you having one of these....'

Òh,' said a very deep voice from behind him. 'Mummy and Daddy wouldn't, would they?'

`He's Santa's friend' said Suzie helpfully, as Daddy grabbed the man by the collar and hauled him to his feet. The paper

bag in his hand fell open, and the sweets tumbled everywhere. 'And he's brought us our Christmas presents. Look!'

She pointed to the table where the noolid was slowly twisting and writhing, and where the box was flashing and bleeping.

`You —'

Ì can explain! Santa was getting in an awful mess with his wormholes,' the man said, his arms flapping as he tried to

reach up to prise Daddy's fingers from his collar. 'And I showed him the future, and all the space-time damage, the

planets full of slave elves!'

`You did, did you?' said Daddy, turning the little man so that he could stare straight into his face. 'Slave elves.'

`Don't hurt him, Daddy,' said Suzy. 'If you do, we won't get any presents.' `Don't worry, sweetheart,' boomed Daddy.

'You'll get your presents, and so will he!'

But Timmy had stopped listening, because, from somewhere far, far away, he could hear the sound of bells, coming

faintly through the crisp, Christmas air. He ran to the window, Suzie close behind, for she'd heard them too.

`Look, Daddy!' squealed Suzie, pointing up into the sky. 'It's Santa! Look Daddy! Look!'

Daddy hauled the man across the room and looked up into the sky, just to keep Suzie and Timmy happy. When he saw

the unmistakeable silhouette of a sleigh, pulled by half a dozen reindeer, he gave a little gasp.

The man struggled in his hands. 'If you'd just put me down,' the man squeaked, 'we can sort all of this out quite

amicably.'

But no one answered him. They were too busy trying to follow the thing in the sky, which seemed to have disappeared

over the top of the house.

`Ho, ho, ho!' came a sudden, gruff voice from behind them. And they all spun around.

Standing there, as large as the Christmas tree itself, was Santa,

sack in hand, smiling broadly.

Uh?' said Daddy, and dropped the little man, who hastily rushed over to stand by Santa's side.

`Nice job,' they heard Santa whisper sarcastically to the man.

Ìt's not my fault that all they want are music centres and computer games,' sniffed the man huffily. 'I just tried to

give them something more educational.' With a slightly guilty look, the man snatched up the noolid and the etheric

stress detector and stuffed them into his pockets.

Ì saw,' said Santa. 'You really do have absolutely no idea, do you?'

`Right, then!' boomed Daddy, finally getting over the shock. 'What the hell's going on here? Timmy, pass me the

phone. I'm calling the police.'

76

77

`You will go to bed and forget that any of this happened,' Santa said in a spooky, haunty sort of voice as he waved his

hand in Daddy's direction. `Chemicals,' he whispered to the little man, showing him something up his fur-trimmed cuff.

'Works every time.'

Daddy blinked and gave a huge yawn, before making his way out of the

living room. The four of them listened as he stumbled up the stairs, mumbling.

'Now,' said Santa, crouching down before the wide-eyed children. 'Let's see what Santa's really got for you, shall we...?'

(Some *of the* children *cheered* at Santa's return, and the little man tried *hard* to hide a *scowl.* 'But what about *the* worms' holes?' *cried*

one.

And the clowns? What about the clowns?'

'Clones,' corrected the man.

'What happened to them? *Were* they sad?' The man sighed.)

Santa was very grateful for the Doctor's help, but clearly, this wasn't going to work.

'I know!' said Santa brightly, once they were back inside the Doctor's wonderful time and space machine. 'Robots!'

'Robots?'

'You could help me build robots to take the place of the clones. And,' he looked around the white, white control room, 'if

you're so clever, you can help me construct safe wormholes that won't damage space-time. Think you're up to it?'

And, of course, the Doctor was up to it, because he was the cleverest Doctor in the whole universe.

('If he was so *clever —' began a* little girl, thoughtful y.

'If he was so *clever,'* jumped in Miss Bennett, 'then there wouldn't have *been* a story, would there, Lucy? And if there hadn't *been* a story, *we* wouldn't have learned something very important, *would we?'*

She paused theatrical y.

And what have *we* learned? Anyone?'

There was *silence.*

'We've learned* that sometimes *we're* not as *clever as we* think *we are, haven't we?* That Just *because we're very* good at some things, it doesn't mean that *we're* better than everyone else at *everything else.'

***Jan,* sitting right at the front, *gave a sigh and* rolled his *eyes, and* as he did so, he caught *sight* of the little man.**

And he *was* rol ing his eyes, *too.)*

Last Minute Shopping

Neil Perryman

`For Rassilon's sake!' cried the Doctor, thumping the console in frustration.

The TARDIS responded with a low, distorted howl, followed by a violent lurch to the right. The Doctor tried to placate the

ship with a gentle mantra of encouragement, but when the time rotor finally juddered to a halt, it did so with an

embittered thud.

The Doctor checked the instrument panels and smiled with delight. Ì knew you wouldn't let me down,' he said, patting

the console affectionately.

Then he checked the readings again, just to be sure.

Satisfied, he poked his head into the corridor and yelled, Ì've done it!' He counted to ten and yelled again. `Come on, we

haven't got all day!'

`This had better be good,' warned Turlough, tightening the belt on his dressing gown as he staggered sleepily into the

console room.

Tegan followed, wrapped in a duvet. `What's going on? It's five o'clock in the morning!' she protested, squinting

against the brightness.

`Nonsense, Tegan! It's the middle of the afternoon, relatively speaking, of course. But that's not the really exciting part!'

the Doctor said, beaming excitedly.

`You did it?' asked Tegan, suddenly wide awake. `You really did

it?'

`Have a little faith, Tegan,' the Doctor chided, activating the scanner with the flick of his wrist. `London — Oxford Street

— Christmas Eve!' he declared triumphantly.

Ì don't believe it,' said Tegan, shuffling over to take a better look. `No signs of nuclear devastation, no prehistoric

Marble Arch, and if I'm not mistaken, that's Selfridges! I'm impressed.'

`We're on a roof,' observed Turlough, dryly.

Òf course we're on a roof! Materialising on the street would have created pandemonium, and things are chaotic enough

down there as it is. Don't worry, there's a fire escape to the rear. Everything is under control,' the Doctor assured them.

Ì hate it when he says that,' said Turlough, stifling a yawn.

`There's just one thing...' began the Doctor sheepishly.

Tegan sighed. Ì can read you like a book, Doctor. This isn't 1984, is it?' Ìt's the early twenty-first century,' the Doctor

admitted. `Fairly dangerous, but nothing we can't handle.'

`Wait a minute, you said it was the middle of the afternoon —'

The Doctor glanced at the console. '3.38pm to be precise.'

`That doesn't leave us much time.'

`We could probably manage a short temporal hop —' said the Doctor, reaching for the controls.

`No!' cried Tegan, swatting his hands away. 'An hour will be fine. Turlough, get dressed. We leave in fifteen minutes.'

The following takes place between 4.00pm and 5.00pm

4.03:31

`Did you know that between 1196 and 1782 this street was used

by the condemned as they made their way from

Newgate Prison to the Tyburn Gallows?' lectured the Doctor, as they reached the intersection between Regent Street

and Oxford Circus. 'My, how things have changed!'

`You think so?' grumbled Turlough. 'They still look condemned to me.' He nodded at a crowd of shoppers, who were

congealing around them.

Òh, do shut up,' snapped Tegan. 'You manage to suck the joy out of everything.'

`You call this joy?' scoffed Turlough, sidestepping to avoid another pushchair. 'Explain one thing to me, Tegan.

IfChristmas is so wonderful, why does everybody look so *miserable?* I don't blame them, of course. I mean, look at this

place! It's a nightmare!'

`He does have a point,' the Doctor agreed. 'The seasonal decorations have reached new heights of gaudiness since my

last visit, and this particular rendition of *Good King Wenceslas* is making me question my •faith in humanity —'

Tegan suddenly halted in mid-stride, which didn't go down too well with the gaggle of pedestrians who were tailgating

her at the time. 'Right, that's it!' she snapped. 'We'll meet back here in an hour. And don't forget: no gift vouchers, or

else!'

Turlough started to argue but Tegan had already melted into the crowd. `So, what do you want then?' he shouted to

the Doctor as a bus rumbled past.

Ì don't really care,' he replied, doffing his hat to an armed police officer who was regarding them suspiciously, 'as long

as it isn't a watch or clock. I've suffered enough jibes about my timekeeping to last me several lifetimes.'

`You're as bad as Tegan. She wouldn't give me any clues either.'

The Doctor sighed. 'All I want for Christmas is a little peace and quiet. Don't concern yourself with me, it's Tegan you

should be worried about. I suggest you acquiesce and buy her something nice, for both our sakes.'

`Well, I don't want anything either. Perhaps we should focus all our efforts on Tegan.'

Àn excellent suggestion,' declared the Doctor, a little too eagerly for Turlough's liking. 'We should split up too, there

are over three hundred shops out there.'

Òne last thing before you go,' said Turlough, grabbing onto the Doctor's sleeve. 'What are you going to buy her?'

The Doctor's features creased with worry. 'I haven't the faintest idea...'

4.14:56

Now this is Christmas, Tegan decided. The sights, the sounds, the queues. As she inched slowly forward she honestly

couldn't remember 8i

the last time that she had enjoyed herself so much (excluding that time she shot a Cyberman in its

chest unit at point-blank range). Sure, surviving life-threatening and marauding monsters did provide her with a

vaguely satisfying adrenaline rush now and again, but you still couldn't beat a good shop as far as she was concerned.

Part of the pleasure came from the fact that it all seemed so perversely normal. Like she was a member of the human

race again. She thought about how easy it would be to slip back into this life again and never look back. But then she

remembered that she'd tried that before and she ended up hating it.

`Nine ninety-nine,' said the cashier in a perfect monotone when Tegan eventually reached the counter.

She handed over the cash with a polite smile.

`Do you have a loyalty card?'

Tegan fumbled for the correct answer. Was the UK a dictatorship now? Was this 1984 in spirit, if not in name? What

happens to people who try to purchase goods without a loyalty card? Torture? Death? Worse?

Ì, er, left it at home,' she mumbled.

When the cashier failed to trigger an alarm or call for help, she was almost disappointed. Instead, she pocketed her penny

change, scooped up the matching sock-and-tie gift pack (black with light grey stripes), and headed for the exit.

There. That was Turlough sorted, and five minutes ahead of schedule too. All she had to do now was find some

question-mark pyjamas...

4.21:22

Turlough was hiding in an alcove between a fast food restaurant and bar, with only a disgruntled smoker for company.

His attempts at shopping had been completely hopeless; everything he had considered so far had been fraught with danger.

If he bought chocolates, she would accuse him of trying to make her fat. If he bought alcohol, she would get drunk and

they would end up arguing again. Flowers? She probably suffered from hay fever. A nice pair of shoes seemed like a

safe bet, but he didn't know what size her feet were (only that they were small enough to fit in her mouth).

It was no good. The shopping was bad enough, but when you factored in the blinding lights, muzak that made your

teeth itch, and recalcitrant

shoppers who seemed intent on causing as much physical damage to his ribs as possible, then it was all too much to bear.

But what *realty* got on his nerves was just how silly Christmas was.

How could a culture marry so many disparate and wholly inappropriate elements together into one incoherent bundle

and still maintain a straight face? Just how do you reconcile the birth of a messiah with an obese stranger breaking into

your home in the middle of the night in fancy dress?

The smoker offered Turlough a cigarette, shrugged his shoulders at the refusal and returned to the restaurant. Feeling

isolated, Turlough took a deep breath and stepped back onto the street.

Even Easter, with its irrational blend of myth, religion and cloying sentimentality made a modicum of sense when

compared to the unbridled lunacy that was Christmas, he decided. And he should know: he had been forced to research

both subjects thoroughly after his fellow Trions cruelly exiled him to Brendan Boys School in a fit of monumental

pique, all those years ago.

A spell on a penal moon would have been preferable; at least he could have got on with the job of smashing rocks into

little pieces without having to worry about what type of card to buy somebody that week.

His thoughts drifted back to the Christmases he spent alone at Brendan. While his fellow pupils were at home with

their families — playing with their new Scaletric sets, no doubt — he had been left to rattle around the empty halls with only

a boil-in-the-bag turkey dinner, a mouldy tangerine, and 2-

Thwack!

A vaguely familiar pain seared across Turlough's buttocks.

`You boy!' barked a disembodied voice, followed by another thwack, harder this time.

Cradling his posterior, Turlough turned around.

`You found me,' he stammered, eyes widening in horror. The tip of a cane was hovering an inch away from his nose.

`Get a bloody move on, you're holding up the bus!' roared the headmaster.

Turlough started to say something but the words lodged themselves in the back of his throat when he saw the bus in

question. It was an open-top double-decker, and it was packed to the rafters with men and women, many of whom were

drunk. Turlough swallowed hard: they were all dressed in school uniform.

82

83

`You've been a very naughty boy!' screamed the headmaster, grabbing Turlough by his ear and dragging him on

board.

4.32:49

Ì can read you like a book,' Tegan had said. Had that been a clue? The Doctor had decided to risk it by starting his search

in the largest bookshop he could find. Not that it was doing him much good.

`What do you mean it's out of print?'

`There isn't any demand for it,' said a teenage shop assistant with a mouthful of gum.

`But I'm demanding it now!' protested the Doctor.

Ì'm terribly sorry, sir, but according to my computer, *The* Plaine Man's Pathway to *Heaven* by Arthur Dent hasn't been

on the bestseller lists since 1601. So, unless you've discovered the secret of time travel, you're bang out of luck, mate. Perhaps

I could interest you in our terrorist-themed gift set that we have on special offer instead?' he said, pointing to a life-sized

cardboard cut-out of a religious fundamentalist brandishing an AK47.

Ànd you have the temerity to call this a bookshop!' cried the Doctor.

Ìs there a problem?' interjected a middle-aged man with an ingratiating smile. 'I'm the manager.'

Àt last!' exclaimed the Doctor. 'Did you know that your employees are completely illiterate?'

`Sir?'

`Not only are they constantly masticating, which makes holding a conversation with them rather irritating, but

they also seem to be labouring under the impression that Albert Einstein was a science-fiction author!'

The manager shrugged his shoulders. 'Temporary staff, what can you do?'

Ànd when I asked for a copy of A Christmas Carol they sent me to the TV Tie-in section!'

Àh, we definitely have a copy of that! Please, wait a moment, sir.' The manager scuttled away, leaving the Doctor

with his assistant, who was determined to break the embarrassing silence with the loudest bubble-popping he could

muster.

The manager returned a few moments later with a paperback copy of the Dickens classic with a TV Tie-in cover.

Ì'm afraid this won't do,' said the Doctor, turning over the book in

his hands.

`What's wrong with it?'

'I was hoping for a first edition or leather-bound hardback. I know you're not supposed to judge a book by its cover,

but I was looking for something a little bit special.'

The manager nudged his assistant out of the way and studied the computer. `We have a first edition copy of Stupid White

Men, signed by the author...'

Àh, now that sounds right up Tegan's street!'

Òh, I'm terribly sorry,' said the manager, tapping the keyboard. 'It's out of stock. Should I order a copy?'

The Doctor was crestfallen. 'How long will that take? Unless I'm very much mistaken you haven't invented the T-Mat yet.'

À few days. A week at most,' said the manager, delicately stroking his chip and-PIN terminal.

P 'I haven't got a few weeks, it's Christmas Eve!'

J

Ìs it our fault you've left everything to the last minute and just hoped for the best?' interjected the assistant, spitting his

gum on the floor.

The Doctor looked hurt. 'Well, it usually works.'

`We put up the decorations in November for a reason, you know. It's for your benefit. If you bought your presents when we

told you to, Christmas wouldn't be so stressful and everybody could put their feet up for a change. But do you listen? Do you

—'

`Shut up!' hissed the manager, elbowing his assistant in the ribs.

`So, if I ordered the book in November I could have collected it

right now?'

pondered the Doctor. `Hmm, I see. Maybe I will then. Could you check?' Ì beg your pardon?'

Ìndulge me. Try "Doctor",' he said, pointing to the computer screen with a hopeful grin.

4.43:04

Tegan was scanning the shop windows like a speed-reader cramming for an exam. Her pyjama hunt had ended in failure:

an umbrella with a 84

question mark handle had come tantalisingly close, but it was eventually rejected for looking a bit

naff. The last thing she needed was a display of watches in a jewellers window reminding her that she had sixteen minutes

left in which to come up with an alternative —

And then she saw it.

It looked like a fob watch or a compass, and it was constructed out bf crystal and brass. But where there should have

been numbers or directions, tiny pictograms adorned its face instead: a skull, an hourglass, a beehive — thirty-six

symbols in total — each one had been hand-painted onto ivory with exquisite precision. It was the very antithesis of naff

Tegan pressed her nose up against the window and drooled. It was perfect. Not only did it encapsulate the Doctor's

inability to keep time or navigate properly, it was completely impractical, too!

She opened the door to the jewellers and rushed inside. `That brass thingy in the window! I'll take it!'

The obsequious proprietor dutifully retrieved the object from its display case and Tegan thrust a handful of crumpled

notes onto the counter. When she heard the reassuring ring of a

cash register, she closed her eyes and smiled.

Ì'm terribly sorry, madam, but we appear to have a problem.'

Tegan's stomach somersaulted. 'What kind of problem?'

`We appear to be a little short,' said the jeweller, slamming the till shut. Tegan snorted. 'Don't be ridiculous, I gave

you two hundred pounds!' The jeweller placed twenty pounds on the counter and stepped back. 'This

isn't legal tender,' he said, pointing at the notes.

That couldn't be right! She'd checked for watermarks the moment the

Doctor removed the notes from the TARDIS safe (which looked suspiciously like a 1950s refrigerator). don't

understand...'

'Take this,' he said, holding up a crisp one pound note to the light. 'This hasn't been in circulation since the 198os.

Remarkable condition, though. It could have been printed yesterday.'

Tegan put her hand to her face and shook her head.

'Wait a minute!' she cried. 'They must be worth something as antiques! I'll sell them to you at face value, you can't say

fairer than that! People still collect *this* sort of thing, don't they?'

'Well, you could try eBay—'

'Great! Which way is it?' she asked, pointing to the street outside.

446:02

Turlough was loitering outside a shop with a woman's name on the door. He could have kicked himself for not coming

up with the idea himself: a woman's shop for a woman's present, it should have been obvious.

It had taken Susan from Personnel to make the connection. He met her on the bus that had been ferrying the local paper

merchant's 'Back to Skool' pub-crawl. They had been a nice group of people overall, except for the headmaster who

bored him rigid with his stories about the TA (which, thankfully, had nothing to do with the Trion Authorities), but it was

a shared contempt for 'Brian' that got him talking to Susan in the first place. She shared a Bacardi Breezer with him

and he shared his shopping dilemma with her. She listened sympathetically and gave him some directions, promising *that*

Tegan would still be thanking him this time next Christmas. He had jumped off at the next stop.

Turlough pushed the door open and peeked inside. When he saw the radically redesigned Father Christmas costume

to his left, he felt certain that he had walked into a fancy-dress shop by mistake. As he started to withdraw, a shop

assistant appeared — seemingly out of nowhere — and grabbed his arm.

'Can I help?' she asked, guiding him back into the shop with a vice-like grip.

It slowly began to dawn on Turlough that he was standing in a shop that was devoted entirely to women's clothing,

and not just any old women's clothing: this stuff was... highly specialised. He had certainly never seen Tegan wear

anything quite like it. Or anyone else. Unfortunately.

'Something for that special lady in your life?' cooed the assistant.

'Not exactly,' said Turlough, 'but I'm running out of options.'

'Let's see what we can do,' she replied, leading him deeper into the shop.

86

I'll come back with the rest later!' Tegan promised. 'You can trust me, I'm a nice person. I've helped save the world loads

of times!'

The jeweller folded his arms and shook his head. 'For the last time, we don't give any credit —'

`But it's Christmas Eve!' cried Tegan, slamming her fist on the counter. The jeweller fixed her with a no-nonsense

stare. 'Would madam like me to call the police?'

85

Tegan took a deep breath. 'Can't you just pretend that the January sales have already started?' she pleaded.

'They did. Last month. Now, if you'll excuse me,' he said, as a cacophony of jangling bells signalled the arrival of another

customer.

Tegan stared at the object resting on the counter. He shouldn't have left it out like that, she thought, drumming her

fingers on the glass. Anything could happen to it.

She bit her lip and frowned.

4.51:32

`You've got to see this!' the shop assistant whispered (badly, thought Turlough) to her colleague as she dragged her

towards him.

`Go on, do it again,' she prompted.

Turlough sighed. 'Do I have to?'

The assistant nodded eagerly. 'A second opinion wouldn't hurt.' `But this is the ninth time!' he protested

wearily.

He eventually relented, and using only his hands, he provided them with an accurate topographical description of Tegan's

physiognomy, only 'his heart wasn't in it anymore.

And why were they laughing? Tegan wasn't deformed, was she?

4.53:10

Tegan glanced over her shoulder and exhaled with relief. Nobody was following her, she concluded.

It had been far too easy: no alarms, no sirens, and no shouts of protest. She hadn't even felt the need to run. She had just

casually scooped it up, dropped it in her pocket and headed for door. The jobsworth had even wished her àMerry

Christmas' on the way out. She tried to assuage her guilt by imagining her future self arriving at the shop to reimburse

him, just about... now. All she had to do was convince the Doctor to bend his precious laws of time. It was Christmas after

all.

She felt a hand pressing down on her shoulder. That's odd, she thought, white gloves and fur. She turned around and

gasped. It was Santa Claus himself.

'Oh, hello,' she said, finally.

He was trying to tell her something but his enormous moustache absorbed his words. He reached into his tunic, pulled

out a wallet and opened it up for Tegan to inspect.

'Oh, I didn't drop my wallet, thanks anyway,' she said, turning to leave.

As Santa pulled her back, she heard a burst of static and then a filtered voice crackled to life: 'Have you nicked her yet?'

Tegan's heart sank.

Santa yanked down his beard and yelled, 'You do not have to say

anything, but —'

Tegan kneed him in the groin and ran.

4.55:37

The Doctor was inspecting a department store mannequin for signs of life. He shook his head and tutted. A Nestene invasion

would have provided him with just the excuse he needed to terminate what was rapidly becoming a thoroughly

depressing and frustrating experience, but alas, it wasn't to be.

It didn't help that he had given large chunks of his shopping budget away to a steady stream of desperate and neglected

people who seemed to need it more than he did. So his choices were becoming more and more limited the further he

managed to travel, which admittedly hadn't been very far. He was now down to his last ten pound note: in this century,

barely enough to cover the cost of wrapping paper.

Whoever it was that first said that it was better to give than receive was obviously extremely well off at the time, he

decided.

But what concerned the Doctor most of all was the fact that something would stop him from going back in time to

order that book. There was no other explanation for it. Unfortunately, all of the scenarios he could come up with for

missing that particular appointment made him worry even more.

He tried to take his mind off the problem by rummaging around in a bargain bin of tacky souvenirs, but an even

better distraction quickly presented itself in the form of bleating horns and screeching tyres that signalled that his help

might be needed. He turned towards the source of the commotion and watched in horror as a taxi swerved to avoid the

trajectory of some fool who had blithely dashed out into the middle of the road without looking where they were going.

The Doctor rolled his eyes. 'I should have guessed.'

4.56:01

The shop assistant stifled a giggle as Turlough struggled to overcome the spring-loaded door. He redistributed the

weight of his shopping and tried again. The assistant waved at him, tears streaming down her face. Turlough tried to

wave back, but his bags — all seven of them — made this impossible.

He finally spilled out onto the pavement and the door slammed shut behind him.

For some unknown reason, he suddenly felt very ashamed. Even more worrying: somebody was calling his name

4.57:07

`Turlough! Move!' cried Tegan, as he appeared out of nowhere to impede her escape —

4.57:16

The Doctor winced as she ran straight into the back of Turlough. He went down like a sack of sprouts. The Doctor

followed the arc of his shopping bags as they spiralled lazily though the air, spilling their contents across the street, and

Tegan in particular. She didn't seem to mind, preoccupied as she was by Father Christmas, who had just rugby-tackled

her to the floor.

The Doctor knew there had to be a reasonable explanation, as he ran towards them as fast as the crowds would allow.

4.58:12

`Rabbits!'

Èaster!' cried Turlough, suddenly regaining consciousness.

He pushed himself onto his elbows and checked his nose for blood. Then he heard the curse again, muffled this time,

but still unmistakably Tegan. Then another voice — masculine and angry — demanding that she cease whatever it was

she was trying to do. He'll be lucky, thought Turlough, turning his head —

He sighed. It was Tegan all right. She was wrestling on the pavement with Father Christmas, which was strange — even for

her — but it was the fact that she was doing it on top of his Christmas shopping that really grabbed his attention.

`Turlough!' she yelled. 'Do something!'

Turlough rolled up his sleeves and pounced.

4.59:35

When the Doctor finally arrived on the scene, Santa was lying on his back with his legs in the air. Tegan was sitting on his

belly, stuffing a handful of cotton and lace into his mouth, while Turlough was tying his hands together with the flimsiest

article of clothing the Doctor had ever seen.

They looked like they were having fun.

4.59:59

`Come on!' shouted the Doctor, dragging his companions away. 'Back to the TARDIS!'

`Well,' said Turlough, when they were hurtling through the vortex again, 'that was fun.'

Tegan folded her arms and scowled at him.

Not to worry, Tegan,' said the Doctor, cheerfully, 'the Eye of Orion virtually guarantees snow at this time of year, we could

—'

'You didn't get me anything, did you?'

The Doctor thrust his hands into his pockets and stared at the floor. 'Well?' she demanded. Silence. 'I thought so.'

She turned to face Turlough. 'Do you have anything to add?'

Turlough raised his palms in submission. 'I bought lots of presents,' he insisted, 'they just happen to be scattered across

half of London at this precise moment. They helped us to escape though, if that's any consolation.'

'You bought those things —for me?' Tegan spluttered.

'Of course I did,' replied Turlough, proudly. 'I spent a hundred and eighty-five pounds and ninety-nine pence in fact.'

He paused to consider Tegan's impression of a goldfish. 'Oh, I'm not supposed to mention that bit, am I?'

'How could you?' she gasped.

'Oh, it was nothing really.'

She reached inside her coat and took out the dented, but still intact, matching tie-and-sock gift pack. She hurled it

at Turlough and it hit him squarely on the nose.

'I'm glad we made that deal after all,' said the Doctor with a raised eyebrow.

'Oh, I got you a little something too,' said Turlough, sounding like he had a cold. 'Sorry, I couldn't help myself. It's

a pity really; you'd have loved them —'

'Deal? What deal?' demanded Tegan.

Turlough decided it was time to change the subject. 'Tell us what you did to upset Father Christmas, first. Have you been

a naughty girl, Tegan?'

'Yes, I was wondering about that myself —' interjected the Doctor.

'I'll explain everything later,' promised Tegan. 'There's something I need to do first.' She reached for the Doctor's

hand and slipped her ill-gotten gains into his palm.

'Merry Christmas, Doctor,' she said, curling his fingers into a fist. 'Don't lose it. I didn't get a receipt.'

The Doctor allowed his fingers to unfurl. 'Tegan — it's — it's just what I always wanted! Turlough, look...' he said,

holding up the gift for his companion to admire. 'It's a watch!'

'It's not a watch,' snapped Tegan.

The Doctor's smile evaporated. 'It isn't?' He examined the object more closely. 'Oh, I see! Yes, of course, it's... it's a

compass! I... er, always wanted one of those too...'

'That will come in handy,' said Turlough, trying not to laugh.

Tegan sighed theatrically. 'It isn't a compass either.'

'Oh dear,' muttered the Doctor, shaking the object vigourously. 'That can't be right.'

The metallic hands on the object were spinning erratically, faster and faster until they blurred into a single hysterical

motion.

Suddenly, the glass cracked and the Doctor stepped back in shock.

Ìs it supposed to do that?' asked Turlough.

Òh dear,' said the Doctor. Deep inside the TARDIS, the Cloister Bell began to toll...

Every Day

Stephen Fewell

'Twas midnight.

That's what they always say, isn't it?

But throughout number fifty-seven Acacia Avenue, the nothingness itself stirred.

At the final stroke even the solitary mouse, grazing silently beneath the toaster, froze as miraculous things

unhappened.

In the front room, unopened presents sat beneath the winking spruce. Holly bristled over the dull, black grate. Clay

figures crouched beside an empty byre, blank eyes fixed upon the unoccupied hay.

In the kitchen the fridge was groaning with food, ready for the approaching festivities. The turkey, banished outside the

back door for want of space, hunkered down in the cold beneath an upturned bucket.

Upstairs in the bedrooms, the occupants of number fifty-seven were sleeping soundly. At the foot of the children's

beds, two stockings, full to bursting, swung their way back to stillness.

Everything was ready for the special day.

It was just before breakfast when the next impossible thing happened. Somewhere, oblivious to the groaning protests

made by the fabric of normality, a blue box was taking shape.

The new arrival flashed in the darkness, then with a crackle of static the air settled as the curious lightning faded.

Two figures emerged.

The first was a young girl in her early teens, with the look of the shyest girl at the birthday party. She stared around,

eyes lemur-like in the blackness. `Barbara —'

Accompanying her was a woman in her early thirties with a lacquered halo of brown hair and the confident veneer of a

schoolteacher. She offered the girl a dusty mint from her pocket.

Vicki had grown accustomed to the gloom, and began to explore. Barbara could make out the pattern of her frock a few

feet away, her arms outstretched like a tightrope walker. 'Be careful,' she cautioned. In the chink of light spilling out

from the Ship, raised beams and treacherously shadowed 'trenches could be discerned.

`Look at this,' said Vicki, offering her hand.

As she took it and sprang over to join her, Barbara instinctively steadied herself with her other hand, and found herself

connecting with rough wood. 'Ouch.'

'What is it? Are you all right?' came a voice from behind them.

She couldn't see in this light.

'Yes, just a splinter,' Barbara replied. So much for nonchalance.

Vicki sneezed. Removing a heavy sheet she had revealed a beautiful wrought-iron cage. After coughing and clearing

the dust with a wave, Barbara could see it was clearly intended for a bird of paradise. Her Aunt Gertrude had kept a mynah

in something not dissimilar. Rumour was she had been left it by a sailor. Barbara was never allowed in the room with it for

long in case it swore.

Such a strange custom: imprisoning lovely things.

'Beautiful, isn't it?' she said, smiling, and realised they were home.

Moments later, Ian, clean-cut in sensible shoes, excitedly joined them. Their pilot was probably still busy on his latest

gizmo inside the Ship. He'd been immersed in it for hours; trying to tune it in, he'd told Barbara, to see a particular year.

Though what year he might be interested in had eluded her. He probably hadn't even realised they'd stopped.

'Yes, definitely some sort of attic,' Ian confirmed. 'We could very well be on Earth.' Was he scared of raising her hopes,

thought Barbara, or just his own?

The three of them tentatively explored the darkness, hampered by the precarious footing and lack of daylight. In a

plastic carrier, Barbara found a pile of what were clearly magazines. Amid the unfamiliar faces, she could just about make

out the odd strapline. The writing was English at least.

'Ian,' she called, 'come and look at these.'

He strained his eyesight to enquire, 'Who is Princess Diana?'

As Vicki giggled incredulously, Barbara was startled suddenly by a harsh light glaring in her face. Instinctively she

raised her hand to shield her eyes from the painful brightness, narrowly avoiding the loss of her footing on the wooden joist.

It was the Doctor.

Vicki was not so lucky. As the torchlight winged her, she tottered sideways with a sharp cry, vanishing in a shower of

stuffed toys. Ian leapt to her assistance, but was too late. By the time he got to her, the bulk ofVicki's leg was thrust through a

jagged hole in the floor, as though submerged in quicksand.

The Doctor bounded over the eaves with the athleticism of a mountain goat, put down his torch, and helped Ian to

heave Vicki out of the hole she'd created.

Once extricated from her predicament, she swiftly recovered and before long had laughed off her scratches. The

Doctor mopped his brow, sweeping the torchlight over the contents of the loft, finally alighting on Barbara's magazine.

Its dog-eared condition showed a good few years had passed since 1987.

`What can England be like now?' thought Barbara, and secretly wondered if it was similar enough for them to stay.

Vicki, meanwhile, 93

was staring down the misshapen hole.

Ìt's a bedroom,' she laughed.

Ian went first, quietly lowering himself down onto the landing below. Vicki followed, with Barbara and the Doctor bringing

up the rear. The old man was adamant about not leaving without apologising for the damage. Barbara was not sure how

they would explain their presence in someone's attic in the first place. Soundlessly they crept downstairs to the ground floor,

not daring to see which bedroom had a newly perforated ceiling.

As they entered the hall, Vicki gasped. Columns of gaudy cards were sellotaped along the stair spindles. A bunch of

green and white hung down beside the grandfather clock. Barbara felt her heart begin to beat.

Ìt's Christmas"

Vicki had rushed off into what could only be the living room. Tentatively, they followed.

It was something Barbara had never dared hope to see again; the tidy fireplace, the quaint crib, the metallic whiff of

hot lights on tinsel and the resinous undertow of spruce.

Ian shot her an exhilarated glance. Barbara had to fight to hold back the first prickle of a tear.

`Father Christmas's been,' he gestured toward the plate of crumbs and port glass near the hearth. Vicki crouched

beneath the tree, surveying the shiny packages with glee.

Ànd he's left presents!'

She did know about Father Christmas, didn't she?

The Doctor was the only one oblivious to the charms of the modestly decorated front room.

Ì've never understood that,' he sniffed.

`What's the matter, Doctor?'

`That,' he harrumphed, jabbing with his finger, 'that tree! After all you wouldn't bring a duck pond inside, would

you? Cover it with glitter. Nonsense!'

Barbara wondered if they had Christmas where the Doctor came from, or whether the humbuggery merely disguised

his concern that finally getting them back to Earth might mean their paths would diverge.

But before she could tease the old man, everyone froze. Upon the stairs came the muffled creak of a footfall. They had

company.

One of the intruders was a bright, smiling girl just a shade younger than Vicki. Her brother, if Barbara had that right,

could only be eight or nine. They greeted the time travellers with open mouths.

The boy's had chocolate round it.

Vicki guiltily put down the parcel she had been shaking.

Àre you Santa?' the boy said, eyeing the Doctor's white hair.

Ian stifled a smile and started to explain how they came to be in the youngster's living room; something unwieldy

about a car crash and the front door being unlocked.

Barbara hushed him with a touch on the arm, and squatted by the children. Ì'm Barbara and this is Ian, Vicki, and

that's —' She hesitated.

The Doctor just harrumphed.

`What are your names?' she finished.

Ì'm Josie and this is Mark.'

Mark danced across the room and pulled the curtains apart with a tug. Above the snowy privet, Barbara could see

the upper bays of the semis opposite; a thrillingly ordinary suburban view.

London?

`Hello,' said the man.

They hadn't noticed him arrive, they'd been so absorbed in the children. He could only be their father.

Introducing himself as George Smythe, he waved away all attempts at explanation, either unwilling to interrupt the

children's mood or simply happy to extend the Christmas spirit.

`Patricia, come down,' he called, 'we've got guests.'

Patricia looked tired. If she was anything like Barbara she'd probably been up all night doing the last-minute

wrapping. She pulled her dressing gown tight across her chest and crossed her arms protectively. Barbara had the first

inkling of how much they had imposed on these poor people already, but she had one burning question.

George answered it, surprisingly, without any puzzled questions of his own. He was an ordinary-looking man, all the

spirit wrung from him by the daily office grind.

`2004:

It sounded, thought Barbara, like the answer to a long multiplication sum.

Josie was asking if Vicki could have one of her presents; they were wasting no time making friends. The poor girl had been

starved of company her own age for years.

Vicki struggled to contain her excitement as the request hung in the air. Barbara found herself blushing awkwardly,

but George was the soul of politeness.

`They're your presents,' he stated simply. 'I'm sure Santa wouldn't mind if you shared them.'

Ì'm afraid we really can't impose on you any more,' said the Doctor, for Vicki's benefit as much as their hosts. 'It's

time we were on our way.'

But George insisted.

Josie carefully selected Vicki a parcel from beneath the tree. Briefly glancing at them for permission, Vicki excitedly

pulled at the wrapping, uncovering a square plastic case.

It was, Josie said, McFly.

Vicki looked curiously at the round silver disc, and said thank you. Far too ancient for her, thought Barbara. Vintage

music! Barbara studied Josie. Drinking in every ounce of Vicki's enjoyment, she didn't seem remotely to mind the loss

of her present.

Again the Doctor made their excuses, but was silenced once more as George invited them to stay for lunch. They hesitated,

but gratitude demanded they accept, and there was still the matter of the ceiling to be broached.

Their apology might be accepted more readily after a couple of ports.

Barbara helped Patricia get a start on the dinner. She was clearly a bit concerned about the practicalities of George's

invitation, but the turkey was a big bronze nineteen-pounder and there were more than enough vegetables.

Barbara took charge of several nets of sprouts, cutting tiny crosses into the base of each brussel. She'd never been sure if

that was a religious or culinary gesture.

Patricia was dressed now, and applied a bit of make-up as she sipped an instant coffee. 'I'm grateful for the extra pair

of hands,' she said. 'There's always so much to do at Christmas.'

`Well,' said Barbara, subduing her delight at all these small familiar rituals, ìt's only one day a year, isn't it?'

Once the bird was in, they joined the others in the sitting room. Ian and the Doctor were gratefully receiving some socks

and a shoe-cleaning kit.

George slumped on the sofa with a glass of spumante as Patricia handed Barbara a tissue-wrapped package.

Ì'd like you to have it,' she said giving her hand a tiny squeeze.

Òh, really, I couldn't,' Barbara exclaimed. She looked up from the silky feminine camisole, suddenly self-conscious

about both the item's expense and Ian's merry glance.

The Doctor was in his element, plugging in something called a 'game console' round the back of the television.

Mark was reading out the instructions. He handed him something called a scart lead. The Doctor frowned; just the

thing he needed for that Time and Space Visualiser, Barbara was sure he was about to say.

With a hum, the squat black box powered into life and before

long Ian was immersed in the world of a gun-toting spy.

He pummelled away at the controls until his thumbs throbbed and his lives ran out. Despite having travelled the galaxy,

Barbara was amazed that just a few decades in the future technology could produce such astonishing sounds and images.

Mark had long since lost interest, and was making snowstorms with the polystyrene packaging. 'I've played them all

before,' he shrugged, when his turn came.

Perhaps he had a friend with one already.

Soon all but one of the presents were opened, and the rug was hidden beneath a blanket of discarded wrapping.

`To Josie and Mark, Happy Christmas, love from Uncle John,' Vicki read from the label.

George leapt up and snatched it off her, making her jump.

`Better keep something to open tomorrow,' he said swiftly. 'Drink anyone?' Ian rather rakishly asked for a pale ale.

Barbara needed coaxing into a sweet sherry before lunch.

As George left the room Josie whispered to her, 'He's not really our uncle.'

`Why Tarzipan?' said Vicki. But even the Doctor was too busy chuckling to explain.

Ì must have heard that one about a thousand times,' Patricia sighed and adjusted her paper crown. It split.

Barbara's gravy had been the big success. 'You make it in the roasting tin, with the meat juices,' she explained.

`Patricia uses a stock cube,' George said bluntly.

`The roasties are good, Patricia,' Ian compensated.

By the time the flaming pudding arrived, Ian looked rather

woozy, but still accepted the heavy dessert. Barbara tried a

spoonful. It tasted of the plastic holly that had melted on its summit.

`Delicious,' Ian said, sharing a glance with her. Sitting back to loosen his slacks, he put a hand to his forehead. 'Ouch. My

system's not used to all this conspicuous consumption.'

Barbara held up a restraining hand, but the wine was already chuckling into her empty glass.

Ì really shouldn't,' she protested, fingering her miniature screwdriver set. 'I like to see a woman drink,' said George.

'Patricia won't touch a drop.' `No, I'll wash up,' offered Barbara, pushing up the sleeves of her cardigan.

That afternoon, Mark and Josie showed no further interest in their presents, and Ian was falling asleep in his chair, so

Barbara hastily assembled some pencils and paper for a beetle drive.

It was always the simple things that kept children entertained.

Some things would never change.

Ian awoke later with a start.

`Have I missed the —' He stopped.

The Queen,' Barbara confirmed. 'And no.'

'I can't seem to get a signal,' said the Doctor. 'We'll have to do without Her Majesty this year.'

Some things really never changed.

`Most strange,' the Doctor audibly ruminated to himself. 'I wonder if this thing is responsible, eh?'

He prodded the games console with his foot, looking like he might well kick it.

`No *Great* Escape for anyone tonight, then, eh?' George groaned

in mock disappointment. He was staring drunkenly at his

wife.

Ignoring him, Patricia put some coffee on.

`Make a wish,' said Barbara, as Vicki cut the Christmas cake.

Àll right.' Vicki closed her eyes and made a visible effort. 'There!' `This, by the way,' Barbara explained, 'is

marzipan, hence Tarzipan.' `Don't you know what marzipan is?' asked an incredulous Josie. `She's

anaphylactic,' Ian explained with a wry smile.

Ì thought your name was Vicki?'

As Barbara took the cups back, Ian stopped her in the hall. 'Are you thinking what I'm thinking?' he asked.

She was thinking that they had spent so long trying get back home. And that only now the opportunity had arisen to

return to some kind of normality did she realise just how much she would miss their life together. Not just with the Doctor

and Vicki, but especially with Ian.

Then again could she really see them together like this, like George and Patricia?

Somehow, somewhere, it just wasn't right.

Ian's eyes glanced ceilingwards. They were right beneath the mistletoe. That was what he was thinking.

Barbara turned and walked away towards the kitchen.

`Sounds like butter?' said Barbara. 'Putter?'

`Nutter?' said Mark. Ian did look a bit mad, manically engaged in his mimèMarge?' Patricia was rewarded with an

emphatic point. 'I'm no good at this. Sounds like marge?'

`Large?' offered an indifferent George.

Why was Ian pointing at the plug socket?

`Charge!' cried Vicki. 978

`The... charge... of-the-light-brigade!' sang the Doctor, and Ian sank exhausted into an armchair to the sound of

frantic applause.

`That's not a film, is it?'

*** * ***

Before long it was evening, and the travellers had yet to make a move. Ian was still sleepy, and the Doctor had enjoyed

rather too much of the vintage port, so when Patricia offered them beds for the night Barbara found herself agreeing, if

only to delay some difficult decisions. She and Vicki were shown to the spare room, the one Vicki had put her foot

through the ceiling of.

Patricia just laughed when she saw it.

This didn't seem odd at the time, but as Barbara lay in bed, staring up into the attic above, she couldn't help marvel at

the Smythes' generosity.

Tomorrow she would look through the phone book, and try and summon up the courage to call anyone she knew.

No. There was something odd here. These people weren't merely generous; it was like they were relieved to have

company.

After the ladies had gone to bed, George, Ian and the Doctor lit a fire.

Ì never can sleep,' George murmured into a Scotch. 'She doesn't love me.'

Even as he protested, Ian found his eyelids begin to droop with the wine and the warmth. The Doctor was studying their

host intently, eyes glittering in the firelight.

Èvery day she loved me a little less.'

`Loved?' said the Doctor.

Much later, Ian awoke in pitch-blackness.

To his surprise he was no longer in the comfort of the armchair, but could feel the floor cut into his spine. He must have

slid off amid his drunken slumber.

The rasp of a match revealed the Doctor's pointed features. His face was a mask of concern.

`Shh,' he whispered. `We're in the attic.'

In the sulphurous glow, Ian could make out the right angles of the Ship.

Ìt won't let me in, Chesterton,' muttered the Doctor grimly. 'We're trapped.'

Ian could see something else in the gloom. Across the rafters, two bodies lay prone.

With great relief they were able to rouse the sleeping Barbara and Vicki. Wiping the sleep from her eyes, the girl spoke

for everyone, 'How did we get up here?'

The air was still and cold as they made their way through the house. Could they have been drugged, wondered Ian?

But why would they have been placed so carefully in the attic? And had their hosts done that, or was it... someone else?

They passed the children's bedroom, with the sounds of sleep coming from it. The family were still in the house. But

something was wrong... something had changed.

Barbara drifted towards the kitchen, and they formed a hushed gathering around the scrubbed, pine table. 'There's

something quite wrong here,' muttered the Doctor.

As Barbara filled the kettle, the Doctor explained in a low voice how he had sat up late with George, but had found

himself nodding off. Dimly aware of twelve striking on the hall clock, the next thing he knew he was in the attic.

The kettle had boiled by now, and Barbara went to the fridge for milk.

'Ian, look at this,' she said.

'I know,' he replied with a smile, 'even the humble milk bottle has been superseded.'

But Barbara had swung the refrigerator door wide open. What was she getting at?

'Last night,' she whispered, 'it was empty.'

'All the presents,' stammered Vicki, returning from the front room. 'They're back under the tree! It's not possible!'

'Now, child,' calmed the Doctor, 'let us put together the evidence and consider.'

But rushing ahead, Ian was already checking the front door and the windows. They were immovable.

Barbara, panicking, turned. What was going on?

A night-gowned figure stood silhouetted at the top of the stairs. 'I told him you'd find out sooner or later,'

said Patricia.

No wonder the children had been so indifferent about their gifts, realised Barbara. They'd already opened them and

played with them.

No wonder their hosts had been so generous, everything they ate or drank replenished itself overnight.

Vicki had started to cry. The Doctor attempted to comfort her, but she pulled away.

'Don't you see,' she sobbed, 'this is all my fault.'

The time-travellers gathered in the guest room while the Smythes breakfasted below. Unsurprisingly the ceiling too had

miraculously repaired itself.

'Don't be silly, Vicki,' Barbara soothed. 'How can it be?'

'When I cut the Christmas cake, you told me to make a wish,' Vicki sniffed, 'so I did. And it's come true.'

'Come along now, child, this isn't fairyland,' chided the Doctor.

Barbara asked what she'd wished for, although she was beginning to guess. 'I wished it could be Christmas every day.'

That day, everyone put on a brave face for the children as they repeated the rituals of present opening, carol singing and

cracker pulling.

Ì don't want my sprouts,' Mark said at lunch.

`Come along now, Mark,' said Patricia, 'they're good for you.' He pushed the plate away with a grimace. 'Do as you're

told,' Patricia scolded, the strain palpable in her voice.

How long had things been like this, Barbara wondered?

`What's yellow and swings through the jungle?' her motto said. Vicki burst into tears.

Could they have jumped a time track again, Ian questioned?

`Never mind the Moroks, Chesterton, this is something entirely different. For a start we're not invisible.'

`But TARDIS could still be malfunctioning, couldn't it?' asked Vicki. `Very possibly,' said the Doctor. After all, it

wasn't letting them in.

By the fourth Christmas Day, the Doctor had a theory that they were caught in something called a 'chronic hysterisis'.

`That'd be the sprouts,' joked Ian, patting his belly.

The important thing, he said, was to change their pattern of behaviour.

They began immediately, refusing to eat a single mouthful all day. This was no great hardship as Barbara had already

exhausted her repertoire of turkey fricassee, turkey soup and turkey curry.

The next day they didn't open any presents. Instead Vicki held them up, and they took turns to guess what was inside.

`Socks, handkerchiefs from Auntie June, hiking socks, Swiss army knife, socks,' Mark chanted.

George made sure one present wasn't touched.

`What's inside?' Vicki wondered out loud.

`Tomorrow,' George said darkly.

`Who is Uncle John?' she asked Josie later.

`Just a friend of Mummy's from work,' she said.

That afternoon Ian caught Barbara in the hall again. She shied away, but he gently stopped her. This time he wasn't so

keen to admit what he was thinking.

`What if,' he eventually hissed, 'the Doctor's done this on purpose, to stop the two of us leaving?'

After washing up the coffee cups yet again, Barbara found herself clawing at the catches on the kitchen window.

`They don't open,' said a voice.

`Just wanted some fresh air,' Barbara lied, hiding her bleeding fingernails.

On the ninth day things had got unbearable.

`Where's

my present from you?' Mark asked his father.

It wasn't an unreasonable question, Barbara realised, as all the others were apparently from Santa.

But George flew off the handle, shouting about ungrateful little wretches. They spent the rest of the day in the bedroom,

listening to him storm around below.

`We always row at Christmas,' said Patricia, matter-of-factly.

Ì'll be the shoe,' said Vicki.

By day eleven their attempts were even more desperate, taking it in turns to win at Monopoly.

Ian winced as his top hat landed on Leicester Square. His shoulder still hurt. He'd spent much of yesterday trying to

break down the front door. Eventually he'd managed it.

There before them lay the icy suburban street, but as Barbara had run down the garden path, the view had billowed

like a stage backdrop. She found herself back at the porch, as if someone had picked her up and turned her bodily

around.

The Doctor had tapped his bottom lip.

`Buying it!' someone cried.

That night they were awake when it happened, holding hands in a circle.

George stayed up to watch the attempt. As midnight struck Barbara felt nauseous, like driving over a hump-backed

bridge. The lights went out.

When Ian opened the attic door, George was grinning up at them

from the landing.

Had Ian noticed, the Doctor whispered, that he never went to sleep? They agreed to confront him that night, once the

youngsters were in bed with cocoa.

`What are you implying?' slurred George.

He'd spent the day drinking all the booze in the house: his contribution to the pattern breaking.

Ì think it's time you came clean,' said Patricia.

Ì came clean,' he shouted repeatedly. 'You, you didn't come clean!' Barbara gave an involuntary cry as he grabbed

the carving knife from the draining board.

`We all know there's only one way out of here,' he screamed, lunging for the table. Barbara leapt up, but he caught her

cardigan, pinning it to the tabletop with the sharp blade. As he struggled to liberate it, Barbara frantically tore herself

free.

Ìan,' she shouted, backing away, 'get upstairs, the children!'

But George was too fast; he caught Patricia by the wrist and spun her in close to him. The steel glinted at her throat.

`Come on, Doctor,' he spat, `we've tried everything else.'

Patricia shrieked and choked as the blade was pulled across her neck, blood soaking into her towelling dressing gown.

She fell, lifeless, to the floor.

`Stop this at once,' barked the Doctor, but he was already retreating too, waving Ian and Barbara out of the room

behind him.

Ian picked up his chair and held George back with it for a few seconds, as he thrusted and parried. But the man was

intent, deranged.

Ian threw the chair at George, and they bolted upstairs.

`Vicki!' Barbara screamed, making it to the landing first. The girl was at the bedroom door, sleepy-eyed. Ian and the Doctor

chivied her inside.

George was thundering up the stairs behind them. Barbara leapt for the other door, anxious to protect Josie and

Mark Slamming and bolting it shut she hurriedly tried to wake the children.

`Mark!' she cried, but his eyes refused to open, and his body was limp. His mug of cocoa lay drained on the bedside

table.

`Nor Barbara choked. 'You monster!'

Outside the door George was laughing. The blade thunked into the wood of the bedroom door. Barbara screamed as it

splintered under the knife's repetitive assault.

Ìt's Christ-mas!' George yelled.

The door crashed in as its hinges gave way. Barbara backed off screaming. Ian and the Doctor were framed in the

doorway, valiantly restraining George, but he threw them off and dived inside.

Barbara was trapped between the bottom of the bed and the wall. She sank downwards, gripping the red of the stocking

that still hung there.

Light flashed as he raised the knife.

Everything went black.

Her next breath was full of dust and cobwebs, but it still came as a relief. They were once more in the attic.

The house below them was silent.

Christmas Day had come once more, just in the nick of time.

They found George at the kitchen table, eyes framed by dark circles. Patricia was making him coffee. She looked like the

idea of a person.

`He's done it before,' she smiled, thinly, 'but it still comes as a shock.' `She left me, you see,' George said, 'she left

me for him.'

Ùncle John,' said Vicki, eavesdropping from the hall.

`She wanted to leave, took the kids, on Christmas Day,' he explained to Barbara, 'and you call me a monster.'

`We've all been here long enough,' said Barbara, touching him on the shoulder.

She put the unopened package on the table, looking up at the Doctor for guidance. George picked at the tape.

Finally, he met her gaze and nodded. 'It's time to let them go.'

Ian was stood with Vicki in the hall. In the distance, the sound of Mark and Josie happily arguing slowly faded.

Barbara kissed him under the mistletoe.

`Happy Christmas, Ian,' she said.

Her eyes were full of joy and sadness.

The TARDIS made a contented hum. The column was moving. They were in flight.

`What happened?' asked Ian, looking around in shock. One minute they had been in the house, the next they were on

their way.

Ì don't know for sure,' said the Doctor. 'But my TARDIS, you see, is a metaphysical engine. It can travel through all the

dimensions related to space and time. It's possible that, on this occasion, we entered the dimension of one man's mind. One

man's imagination.'

Ì'm glad it wasn't my fault,' said Vicki.

Ìt was horrible,' shuddered Barbara. 'To be trapped forever in a single moment of time, unable to move forward.'

`You freed him from that,' said Ian. He put his hand on her shoulder. After a moment, Barbara took it.

`Horrible, yes, my dear,' agreed the Doctor, 'and so very sad. When you love someone, you have to let them go —' He made his

way to the Time and Space Visualiser once more, swinging open the door of its access panel. 'And hope, and pray, that one

day, somehow, despite the odds, they make their way back to you.

Now then, let's see if we can get this thing,' he muttered, 'to summon up 2164...'

And that was the last thing he said for several hours.

The Eight Doctors of Christmas

Matthew Griffiths

In my first incarnation,

My Susan came with me

In a TARDIS with a spare key.

When my second self was caught, I

Returned to Gallifrey,

With two mortal chums

And the TARDIS, reluctantly.

For my exile, my third self

Was stranded on Sol Three,

Prevented evil plans,

With mortal chums

And the TARDIS not working for me.

In Omega's grotto,

My first selves (one to three)

Fought appalling guards,

Prevented evil plans,

With mortal chums,

Got the TARDIS repaired and free.

Resisting Cyber-vengeance,

My fourth self got to see

Fine gold things!

Floor-crawling mats,

Steel henchmen,

Two mortal chums,

And the TARDIS had a message for me.

When my fourth self met the Vardans,

My chambers had concealed

Matrix keys behind lead-

Lined mouldings.

I fought Kelner's guards,

Beat Sontarans,

With mortal chums,

Got my TARDIS and Presidency.

With four days to Doomsday,

The fifth version of me

Sent balls a-spinning,

Tricked Greeks obeying,

Foiled giant frogs,

(Forestalling Monarch's works,

Green henchmen,

For mortal chums),

Got the TARDIS back safely.

In the Death Zone, Borusa

Won immortality,

With android a-killing

Cybermen climbing,

Trick chess a-playing —

Mind probing! —

Caught, cornered Dalek.

Three spent selves

(With mortal chums)

Reversed the force-field's polarity.

On J7 station

My sixth self found Jamie,

Dastari's chancing

A maid augmented,

Seville cats not skinning

Shockeye's a-slaying —

My giddy aunt!

Poor Oscar's dead —

Beat Sontarans,

Saved mortal chums.

Now the TARDIS works remotely.

Then my sixth self faced trial with

His future history

By Time Lords and Keeper,

Time Ladies fancy.

Valeyard's skill in

Seventh Door provision

Fixed screens a-lying —

Lives owed him!

All stalling words,

Defence rests

On mortal chums

And the TARDIS's memory.

My seventh self taught Alphans

How to behave sadly,

With Pipe People helping.

Trevor's book-keeping

Found Killjoys missing,

Ace made a victim,

Kandyman killing,

Stigorax baying

(While drones sing),

Earl's haunting blues.

Weep, Helen A!

Your mortal chums

Paint the TARDIS rather gaily.

My eighth incarnation

Woke in a mortuary.

Not Second Coming —

In spite of hyping —

Time Lords a-leaping,

ITAR guests dancing,

Eyes made a-blinking,

Seventh form a-gurning,

Sick Bruce decaying —

Fat lady sings!

Poor planet Earth!

Three French pecks

With a mortal love,

And a TARDIS with a spare key.

The Little Things

Paul Beardsley

The message on the console monitor flashed 'WARNING: SHELL ROOM FULL' in big red letters. The Doctor was beside

himself with indignation and disbelief.

`Full?' he protested. 'I never use the shell room. Unless...' He frowned, the shadow of doubt causing his brow to furrow.

'Look at this, Romana. Have you ever seen such nonsense?'

Èither it is nonsense,' Romana agreed, 'or your chameleon circuit is working again.' She grinned excitedly. 'Shall we

find out?'

She opened the main doors. In unison the two travellers donned their hats and walked out onto the wet sand of a new

world. They looked back at the TARDIS; it was still in its familiar police box form.

`Well, someone's not telling the truth.'

The shell room was the room inside the TARDIS where the plasmic shells —the exteriors — were stored. Each time the

TARDIS landed in a new location, it selected the most suitable shell to serve as its current exterior. If none of the existing

shells were suitable, it would scan its surroundings for something commonplace and appropriate that it could copy to

model a new shell; on departing, it would store the new shell with all the others.

That was the theory. Not that it applied to the Doctor's TARDIS; a long-term problem with its chameleon circuit meant it

only ever used the police box shell. But if the shell room was back in operation...

They continued to stare at the police box exterior. It continued to not change.

After a while Romana's attention wandered and she found herself taking in her surroundings. They were standing on a

vast beach lit by a green-andpurple moon large enough to have moons of its own. Things moved across the landscape, distant

things resembling animate piles of rocks, but one, nearer than the others, more closely resembled a giant hermit crab. It

was a little larger than a police box, and its claws were in proportion.

Keeping her gaze on the approaching crab, Romana said, 'Perhaps the chameleon circuit is still creating plasmic shells,

it's just not putting them outside. Doctor, don't you think we should go in now?'

Òf course!' the Doctor agreed. 'We need to find the shell room. Come on!'

He strode back into the TARDIS and headed purposefully down the interior corridor. Romana closed the main doors and

hurried after him. They followed a winding route, eventually arriving at their destination: a plain, unmarked door.

The Doctor opened the door, looked in, then closed it, shocked. In a confidential whisper he told Romana, 'There's a

shell in my shell room.'

Òh, honestly, Doctor. What did you expect?' Romana opened the door and walked right on in. Warily, the Doctor

followed.

The shell room was more like a corridor, ten metres wide, perfectly straight and stretching far into the distance. One side

was a narrow walkway, the other a series of circular platforms,

each supporting a single plasmic shell.

The nearest one was a giant seashell, the sort favoured by giant hermit crabs. It was the most recent of a dizzying

array of exteriors. Many were readily identifiable from past adventures; many more were not. The Doctor, having

overcome his initial shock, darted from one plasmic shell to another, his curiosity working overtime. He stopped to examine

a wooden pavilion, a corrugated iron hut, a saucer-shaped tank (based on a da Vinci design), a large rock, a marble

summerhouse, a Punch and Judy kiosk, an Atlantean bathing machine. And another rock, slightly different to the first.

`What splendid souvenirs!' he declared. 'Some of them would have been terribly useful at the time.'

There was a matchbox, a computer bank, a huge Aztec vase, a frosted glass pyramid, a Chinese tent, a petrified tree, and a

non-petrified tree. There was a vacant platform, evidently reserved for the police box shell, and beyond that, a red pillar

box.

`Look, Romana,' the Doctor said excitedly. 'That was the last exteripr before the chameleon circuit failed.'

`What is it?'

Ìt's for sending post. You put the letters in this slot at the top, and later the postman opens this door at the front and

collects them.' He tried the door but it was locked.

Romana was intrigued. Perhaps it held a clue to why the chameleon circuit had broken? She tried the lock with her sonic

screwdriver, and was rewarded with a satisfying click; the door swung open. She looked inside.

It contained an item of mail.

In the TARDIS kitchen the Doctor held the envelope over the steaming spout of a boiling kettle. Once this was done he

carefully peeled it open.

Then he made a pot of tea.

`That's the trouble with exteriors that resemble commonplace items,' he said. 'They get mistaken for commonplace

items.'

`How long do you suppose it's been in there?' Romana asked as she delicately removed the envelope's contents: a

Christmas card, a letter and a photograph of a baby. 'I keep expecting it to crumble into dust.'

Òh, it's four hundred years old if it's a day. And it's certainly a day.' He put the tea tray down on the big oak table where

Romana was sitting and began to pour. 'It must have been while I was travelling with my granddaughter Susan.

We'd decided to spend a few months in England in the 196os. Naturally I had to check it was safe so we paid a brief visit

to the 1990s, just to make sure England had a future. What does the letter say?'

The ink had faded in places and the handwriting was decidedly difficult to decipher. It was to someone called Helen

Thompson from someone called Jennifer. Last month, cousin Sam and Alan had a lovely baby girl (or possibly son, it was

hard to be sure) called Kim. Jennifer bought a new dress last week, Harold nearly fell off the roof while fixing slates, and they

were thinking of getting a computer so they could surf the internet. The attached photograph was evidently of baby Kim.

The Christmas card said, 'Love from Jennifer and Harold,' in what was presumably Jennifer's handwriting.

Gravely, the Doctor declared, 'That should have been delivered.'

`Do you think it's that important? It seems such a small matter.'

He shrugged. 'You say Sheeboogan, I say Shobogan. It's important enough to Helen Thompson. Besides, it's always the

little things that get overlooked, and before you know it they've grown out of all proportion: for want of a nail the roof

blew off!' He frowned thoughtfully. 'Helen Thompson... wasn't there a famous biologist of that name' Cured lots of

childhood diseases, saved uncountable lives, won an Outstanding Citizen Award in 2023?'

Kg, recharging in a corner, said, 'Affirmative, master.'

The Doctor checked the address on the envelope. 'And did she come from Derbyshire?'

Àffirmative, master.'

Eyes wide, the Doctor whispered, 'This is serious.'

Ìndeed,' Romana agreed.

`The news of the birth of Sam and Alan's son —'

or girl —'

might have been the catalyst that launched her career.'

Romana gasped, knowing it must be (or at least could be) true. `To think of it. All those children! So much resting on

such a little thing.'

Airily the Doctor said, 'Of course, it could be another Helen Thompson entirely.'

Òf course!'

Ànd she might have become a paediatrician anyway.'

Àbsolutely!'

`But then again she might not. And if not... Well, it would be all

my fault.'

Romana gave a respectful pause before pointing out the difficulty that they were going to have to address. 'You know we

can't possibly re-post it. People don't send each other four-hundred-year-old letters. It's just not done. Not even on

Gallifrey.'

`Romana... we're going to have to produce a facsimile.'

*** * ***

It was more easily said than done, of course. It was hard enough to read the faded handwriting, let alone forge it.

There was also the matter of Kim's gender. The consensus of Time Lord, Time Lady and robot dog was that the word

was 'girl' rather than 'son', but they were far from certain. The photograph wasn't much help either, but at least it was

reproducible: the Doctor kept a pixel-enhancing scanner for eventualities like this.

More seriously, although the Doctor was able to remember the date that *he* and Susan had made their brief 112

reconnaissance (17 December) and the location (St Albans, Hertfordshire), he could not remember the actual year. And

Jennifer had not written it in her letter.

Ìt was definitely the mid nineties,' the Doctor said. 'Or was it late? Aha!' `You've remembered something?'

`There was a comet! Susan and I were in a pub! The Fighting Cocks, it was called. I distinctly remember two chaps talking

about a comet they'd seen that spring. One of them had taken some photographs of it and he'd only just got them

developed. Kg, were there any bright comets visible from England in, oh, 1995?'

`Negative, master.'

`What about 1996?'

ÀffirmaTive, master. Comet Hyakutake was visible to the naked eye between March and June of 1996. It reached

first magnitude on...'

`Perfect! Perfect!' The Doctor swept out of the kitchen and headed for the control room.

A short while later the TARDIS materialised beside a lake in the ruined Roman fortress of Verulamium, a short walk

away from the town of St Albans.

Newspapers confirmed that the date was 16 December 1996, giving them several hours to scour the card shops and

newsagents for a card exactly like the original. This proved more difficult than anticipated.

Òh, this one will do,' the Doctor said at last. It was gone 5.3opm, and the WHSmith's assistants were understandably

impatient to close the shop and go home.

`Doctor, perhaps something a little more similar might be appropriate? I'm not sure that an innuendo about "giving

your bird a stuffing" was quite what Jennifer had in mind. Whereas this one at least shows children singing carols around a

Christmas tree.'

The Doctor reluctantly conceded.

Once the card was ready to send they found a pillar box in the town. But instead of posting it right away, the Doctor sat

down on a nearby bench under a street lamp.

Romana joined him, puzzled. 'What are we waiting for?' she asked.

'Last collection. It was originally posted tomorrow, so the postmark should have had tomorrow's date.'

'Is that important?'

'Little things, remember? It shouldn't be more than ten minutes.'

While they waited, Romana said, 'You know, we could really do with something to measure stochastic outcomes and

timeline deviations. If only we had a chrono-historical stress gauge. That would be so useful.'

The Doctor's grin was broader than usual as he produced a boxed object the size of a carriage clock from a copious

pocket. 'Will this do?'

It was just what they needed. But Romana was less than impressed. 'Wherever did you get that? A galactic car boot

sale?'

The Doctor's grin unbroadened slightly. 'Well, as a matter of fact...' 'It's not Gallifreyan. It's probably not

even...'

'It was a bargain!' the Doctor barked defensively. 'It came in its original box, complete with guarantee and instruction

manual.'

'Don't tell me you actually *read* the instruction manual?'

'Read it? Romana, this is my area of expertise — well, one of many, of course — I could have written the instruction

manual!'

'I'll take that as a no.'

But the Doctor seemed to know what he was doing. 'Maximum range... that's about fifty years into the future.

Sensitivity, high; spatial range, planetary... That should do it.'

The reading was 1.377 Entropic Displacement Units.

'That's a bigger strain on history than I expected,' the Doctor

admitted. 'But it should drop to zero — or as close as

makes no difference — as soon as the card is in the post.'

So when the last of the day's mail had been collected, Romana posted the card and the Doctor confidently took a second

reading. It now read 1.401.

Back in the TARDIS they spent several hours arguing over where they'd gone wrong.

'It's got to be the baby's gender,' the Doctor said for the twenty-eighth time.

'Or the card. Romana, I told you we should've got that other one...'

'Be quiet a minute, Doctor.' Romana had thought of something. 'K9, were

there any bright comets...'

'Oh, come on!' the Doctor said, annoyed. 'We already know there was a comet in 1996!'

'...visible from England in 1997?'

'Affirmative, mistress,' said K9. 'Comet Hale-Bopp reached magnitude —0.5 In April 1997.'

The Doctor was momentarily speechless. 'It's not fair!' he said at last. 'How was I to know there'd be two in two years?

They're comets, not buses!' In a lower tone he added, 'You realise what this means?'

`We posted it a year early?' Romana said. `Romana... we posted it a year early!'

They decided the best course of action was to retrieve the card before the morning collection. It was now 2am. That gave

them several hours; it also meant the town was largely deserted, save for some revellers on their way home from a party.

Ìt's my guess that Helen Thompson wrote back and asked about Sam and Alan's baby,' Romana was saying. Ìf word got

back to Sam and Alan... well, perhaps they weren't ready for that sort of prophecy.'

`Some things are best not known in advance,' the Doctor agreed. `Parenthood, surprise parties, assassinations.

Keep watch, will you?'

While Romana checked that the coast was clear, the Doctor opened the pillar-box door with his sonic screwdriver.

Then he began to search for the card. The trouble was, at least a dozen letters had been posted in the last few hours, and

the street lighting did not make it easy to read the addresses.

`Someone's coming!' hissed Romana. 'A policeman"

À policeman?' the Doctor asked sceptically.

`Yes!'

Òn the beat? In 1996? That's very unusual. Are you sure it's not someone in fancy dress?'

Ì'm positive!'

The Doctor was alarmed now. 'But I can't find the card.'

`Take the whole lot and sort it out later!'

The Doctor saw the wisdom in this. Grabbing all the mail, he hurriedly slammed the door shut. He affected a

nonchalant poise as he re-posted each item, giving the policeman a friendly nod as he passed.

The very last item was the card to Helen Thompson. He thrust it into a pocket and consulted the gauge again. 'It

should be back to its old setting now,' he said.

It read 27.999. The Doctor nearly choked.

`You dropped this one,' Romana said, picking a small brown envelope up off the pavement and posting it. 'What does it

say now?'

The reading was back to 1.377.

Ì don't know what you just posted,' the Doctor said, 'but it must have been very important.'

They landed on the other side of the lake on 17 December 1997. It was lunchtime. This time they found an identical Christmas

card and with time to spare, much to the relief of the staff of WHSmith's.

The new pillar box at the end ofFishpool Street was nearer than the one they had used in 1996.

Ìsn't Fishpool Street fascinating?' the Doctor was saying. 'Such unusual

pavements, over a foot high in places. I've always meant to find out why.' He took the card out of his pocket and made to

post it.

`Stop!' cried Romana.

The Doctor paused. 'Why?'

`The pillar box is humming '

`Humming?' The Doctor pressed his ear to it. There was no mistaking it; it was humming. 'You know what this

means?'

Òf course I know what it means.'

`To think, though! What if I'd posted it? What would we have found in the shell room?'

Romana considered. 'A four-hundred-year-old card together with a four-hundred year old

facsimile of itself.'

Òr... What if the thing we found was the facsimile? A facsimile of a 1. facsimile, a thing we copied so that it would

be there for us to copy. Leaving nothing for Jennifer to do... in fact she probably wouldn't have existed! So what was

her name doing on the card?'

Romana grabbed him by the arm and marched him in the direction of the town. 'But you didn't post it, did you?'

1 They finally posted the card in the pillar box across town. The Doctor took another reading on the gauge, which read

1.376.

"Well, it is an improvement,' he said.

`Give me that,' Romana said, taking the gauge from him. 'And the box it came in.' She took out the instruction

manual and speed-read it. 'Just as I I thought. "To ensure accurate reading after planetary relocation, perform hard

reset."' A few button-presses later she smiled triumphantly as she showed the Doctor the new reading: zero.

`We did it after all!' the Doctor said, delighted.

`Yes, Doctor. We did. Next time, perhaps *we* should read the manual.'

It had been cloudy but the sun came out as they strolled back to Verulamium. At Fishpool Street they had to squeeze

past two middle-aged women who stopped on the pavement while one posted an envelope in the humming pillar box.

'An old lady I write to,' she explained to her friend.

A little further on they bowed their heads so that their hats concealed their faces as they made way for a white-

haired old man and his teenaged granddaughter. The old man was saying, 'How fascinating, Susan, yes, how very

very fascinating! England now has a decimal currency system yet they still use feet and yards!'

It wasn't until they were back at the TARDIS that it struck them both. 'Old lady?' they said in unison.

And a moment later the Doctor remembered that the famous twenty-first-century biologist was actually called Helen

Thomson... without àp'.

Such a little thing, he thought.

He decided not to mention it to Romana.

Helen Thompson was an old lady. In the last few months age had finally started to catch up with her. The Derbyshire

winter bit hard, and she knew that Christmas 1997 was the last Christmas she would see.

Not that Christmas meant much to her any more. Her friends had died off one by one, and her family had lost interest in

her. It was two years since she'd heard from her daughter-in-law; since then, there'd been nothing. Not even a Christmas

card.

She lived alone. Soon she would die alone, forgotten even by her neighbours.

But not completely forgotten. There had been a girl called Jennifer (girl? she must be forty now!), a student teacher she had

worked with twenty years ago. Jennifer had moved away, but she'd kept in touch: a Christmas card, a birthday card, a newsy

letter now and then.

It was a little thing, but it meant a lot to her. It meant that, on her very last Christmas, there would be one card on her

mantelpiece, and a photograph of a beautiful new baby, instead

of nothing at all.

Beep the Meep's Grundian Egg Nog

Paul Condon

When the Most-High was asked to contribute a recipe for this book, he thought of the time when he was happiest:

and naturally thought of the glorious day when the Most-High gave a Grundian Blood-Nog to more than a hundred

despised human scum in Blackcastle Steel Works. However the impudent editor suggested that a more festive concept

might be a Grundian Egg Nog. The Most-High dislikes the idea of making anything more palatable to disgusting humans,

but understands that He has an image to maintain as a cute and cuddly furball and will — on this occasion — go along

with this subterfuge for His own evil ends. However, the Most-High strongly recommends not doing any physical

work oneself: get

,i

ting a 6 zombified black sun slave to prepare the drink saves one from getting one's paws dirty.

Ingredients

1.21/2pt whole milk

6 eggs

***Caster sugar is a much smaller version of**

standard granulated sugar. In the USA it's

5og caster sugar*

known as 'superfine' sugar. If you can't find any

vanilla pod, split

caster sugar in your local supermarket, simply

2oom1/6f1 oz brandy

pop some granulated sugar into your food

Cocoa powder for dusting

processor for a few minutes.

Method

Place the milk, eggs, sugar and vanilla pod in a medium-sized saucepan and heat gently. As this is a very rich recipe for

special occasions, try not to Substitute the whole/full-fat milk with a skimmed or low-fat alternative, as *this* will detract

from the texture and flavour of the recipe.

Whatever you do, make sure you don't allow the mixture to boil: just keep everything nicely warmed. You'll know when

the mixture is ready by dipping A spoon in the mix. If it's thick enough to coat the back of the spoon, it's ready to use.

Don't forget to take the vanilla pod out, though!

You now have a choice: you can serve your egg nog either hot or cold. For a chilly winter's evening, I always prefer to

serve it piping hot.2ooml/6f12oom1/6fl

Whichever option you choose, simply divide the brandy between four glasses and pour the egg nog mix on top. Finish

with a gentle dusting of cocoa powder on the top, and serve. For an extra festive twist, a little grating of nutmeg mixed in

with the cocoa powder gives a seasonal flourish. Mmmm! Warms the cockles of your heart.

The Brig's Brandy Butter

Paul Condon

Did you know that every year, the old chaps and chapesses from UNIT still get together for a bit of a shindig? It's true.

Corporal Bell sends out the invitations in nice brown envelopes with 'Top Secret' stamped on them in red, and we all get

together in a disused MOD bunker just off Whitehall. Benton brings a four-pack of cider, Harry makes a nice spread of

sandwiches, and Yates brings along the tinsel and lights to cheer the place up a bit. I always take along some mince pies and

brandy butter: thought you chaps might like to know how to make the Brig's Brandy Butter, to serve alongside your own

mince pies and Christmas pudding. I know it's not the same as attending the UNIT Christmas Reunion, but at least you'll get

the gist of what a cracking event it can be!

Ingredients

4oz/125g unsalted butter, softened 4oz/125g icing (confectioners') sugar

2 tbsp boiling water

3 tbsp brandy

Method

Take a medium-sized bowl and pop the unsalted butter in it. If you have a microwave oven, you might like to very slightly

soften the butter for a few seconds: but be careful! Don't nuke the butter or it'll be as useless as Jo Grant without her

contact lenses.

Now, sprinkle the icing sugar in with the softened butter and cream them together using a fork. Once they are combined,

pour on the boiling water and brandy, and continue to blend them together until the mixture goes smooth. If you've got a

food processor, you might want to use it for blending the ingredients together: otherwise you'll need a wee bit of elbow

grease! Doris usually helps me with that bit.

Once you've got the mixture to a nice creamy consistency, pop it into a fridge and chill it until you need it. Works

marvellously with mince pies or Christmas pudding.

For an alternative take on the recipe, why not try substituting the brandy for some other liqueurs? Cointreau, Grand

Marnier and Jack Daniels all provide a delicious flavour when used in this recipe.

118

119

The Game of Rassilon

Lawrence Miles

In the Dark *Time* of Gallifrey, when Rassilon still walked in the trappings of a man and *the* universe was less than half its present size, the Time Lords — cruel and remarkable as they *were* — thought nothing of using the *'lesser' beings for* their sport. Their victims *were* dragged across the span of time, brought together in the bloody arena of the Death Zone, to play barbaric *games* against each other until only a

single champion remained *alive.* .

Those were the days.

Preparing the Game

First, make copies of all the game-cards on the following pages: there are twenty-six of them in all, eighteen of them

representing monsters or Characters and eight representing locations inside the Death Zone. Ifyou want to do things

properly, then stick each one to a piece of card once you've cut them out. If you really want to do things properly, then

stick pictures of the monsters to their cards as well. (Alternatively, those of you who collect such things might want to use

the pop-out Doctor Who figures that used to come free In packets of Weetabix. All the monsters featured here are

Weetabix compatible.) You'll also notice five counters printed at

the end of these instructions, marked i, 2, 3, Run and

Retreat. You should make two copies of these, one set of counters for each player.

To play this game you'll also need some dice, plus the obligatory pen and paper.

Setting Up the Game

To begin with, each player picks three monsters or characters from the pool of eighteen. These are the beings who'll be

fighting for you inside the Death Zone. Players take it in turns to choose their monsters, although if you've both made copies

of the game-cards then you can pick whichever monsters you like without worrying that your opponent's going to take your

favourites first. Through bitter experience you'll discover that some monsters work better when used in conjunction with

others, so your choice shouldn't be entirely random.

Next, shuffle the eight location cards. One location from the top of the pile Is put face-up between the two players: this is

where your first battle in the Beath Zone is going to take place. Each player then puts his three monsters on the table, in a

triangular formation. The monster at the head of the triangle, closest to the location, is your champion and will be doing all

the fighting at the

start of the game. These six proud monsters are now in *the* Zone. And don't forget, each player should also be given a set

of five counters.

Finally, take your piece of paper, write down the names of your three monsters, and underneath that record each

monster's strength (as you can see, the strength of a monster is given as a number on its card). A monster's strength

will sink as it's damaged in battle, and it won't surprise you to

hear that a monster dies when its strength hits zero.

The game is divided into rounds of battle, and the first round is now ready to start.

Each Round

With the two champions facing each other in the Death Zone, in each round of battle a player simply has to decide what

moves his champion's going to make. Every monster has three different kinds of attack listed on its card: some attacks

are melee attacks (i.e. hand-to-hand fighting), some involve weapons, and some are hi-tech attacks using obscure alien

technology. When a round of battle takes place, you choose an attack from your champion's list of three but don't tell

your opponent what it is. Instead, look among your five counters for the type of attack you want to use. Then put that

counter facedown on top of the monster.

When both players have chosen their attack, the counters are turned face-up and each player finds out what his

opponent's doing. Your monster makes the attack you chose, and the enemy makes the attack he chose. And that's the crux

of the game, because some *attacks cancel others* out. In every round, you have to try to pre-empt your opponent and block

whatever move he makes.

Here are the basics:120

121

r. If your attack is described as a long-range attack (e.g. a blaster or a Dalek gun), then it cancels out any *melee* attack being

used by the enemy: the enemy's attack has no effect, since you're shooting him before he can get close enough to hit you.

Your long-range attack will do damage to the enemy champion, but his melee attack won't damage yours.

2.If your attack jams weapons, then it cancels out any weapon attack being used by the enemy. Again, your attack will

do damage but the enemy's attack will have no effect at all.

3.And if your attack smashes machinery, then it cancels out any hi-tech attack being used by the enemy this round.

If you damage your enemy, and your attack isn't jammed, smashed or thwarted by long-range fire, then the enemy

champion loses some of its strength. You'll notice that each attack on a monster's card states how much damage it does: a

Cyberman, for example, does 3d damage with its melee attack. This means that when the Cyberman damages the enemy,

you roll *three* dice and subtract the total from the enemy champion's strength. (We're assuming here that the dice all

have six sides, and didn't come out of a

***Dungeons* and *Dragons* set.) Note that if both champions hit each other, then they take their damage at the same time: it's**

possible, though unlikely, that the two champions will wipe each other out simultaneously.

If your champion has no strength left after this battle, then the champion is slain and you immediately lose the game,

even if you've got other monsters *left* alive in the Death Zone. Assuming that both sides survive, the round ends and a new

round begins. . and so on until somebody's champion dies.

Controlling the Death Zone

Here's where it gets tactical. If there's a round of battle in which you hit your opponent, but your opponent doesn't hit you,

then instead of rolling dice for damage you can show mercy and take control of the location where you're fighting. This

means that rather than shooting at the enemy champion, you're making yourself a base-camp and taking command of

any strategic advantages the terrain might offer. If you take control of a location, then turn the location card so that it's

facing you: you now gain any special bonuses described on that card. (Note: some locations, like the Booby-Trapped

Hallway, affect the game even if *nobody* controls them. Don't forget to pay attention to where you are.)

Just remember: you can only take control of a location if your opponent didn't make a successful attack against you,

and you take the location instead of hurting his champion. And yes, you can take a location that your enemy's currently

controlling. That's war.

Special Moves

Among your counters, there are two that don't bear numbers: Run and Retreat. When you choose your move in battle, you

can choose one of these instead of making an attack.

. Run. If you run, then your champion decides that it doesn't like the look of its present location and takes the fight

somewhere else. After this round of battle, put the current location card on the bottom of the pile and take a new one from

the top: the next round will be fought in the new location. Of course, this is a very useful thing to do if your enemy

controls the current location, because it gets rid of any advantages the terrain might give him. The trouble Is that while

you're running, you're defenceless. Any attack the enemy makes against you will hit your fleeing champion, and do damage.

2. Retreat. You lose the game if your champion dies, but sooner or later you're going to find your champion running out

of strength and on the verge of defeat. So, you may want to remove it from battle and let a new champion take over. If you

retreat, then after this round of battle you can choose another one of your monsters in the Death Zone: that monster will

become your new champion in the next round (so swap the positions of the two monsters). But as with running, your

champion's defenceless when it turns its back on the

battlefield, giving the enemy a chance to launch a last-minute attack and perhaps even kill your monster while it's

leaving the arena... something that will, of course, lose you the game before your new champion can take its place. You'll

find that it's *very* important not to leave your champion fighting until the last minute before retiring it.

Final Notes

You'll notice that, thanks to their special abilities, some monsters occasionally get a 'free attack'. This means that

after the current round of battle, there's a bonus round in which only that monster can make a move. The opponent can't

choose an attack, or run, or retreat. The enemy champion just has to stand there and take whatever the monster throws

at it.

Oh, and you'll notice that quite a few monsters have special abilities that allow 'you' to do something. 'You' means

the player who controls the monster, and nobody else.

Thus ends this tutorial on battle in the Death Zone. Just remember: to win is to lose, but even so there's nothing more

satisfying than wiping out the ruler of the Dalek Empire with a Quark.

Monsters and Characters

Sarah Jane Smith

Strength: 10

Companion. When your champion reveals its attack, it can use

Sarah's attack of the same type instead: e.g. if it's making a

weapon attack then it can choose to use Sarah's weapon.

Melee: **Nuisance. If the opponent is using a hi-tech attack, then the machinery is smashed and that hi-tech attack can't**

be used next round.

Weapon: Ability to Escape. Run to a new location after this round. The enemy champion doesn't do any damage while you're

escaping (unless this 'weapon' gets jammed).

Hi-Tech: Spanner in the Works. id damage, jams weapons.

Draconian Prince

Strength: 25

Anti-Dalek Alliance. If the Prince is in the Zone, then whenever a Dalek champion is in battle the Prince can do 3 damage

to it (during the battle). ***Melee: My Life at*** **Your Command. If the enemy is using a hi-tech attack, then the attack fails and both**

champions (the Prince and enemy) are killed. Following this noble act of self-sacrifice, each player immediately chooses

a new champion or loses the game.

Weapon: Noble Arms. 3d.

Hi-Tech: Diplomatic Immunity. 3d, jams weapons.

The Doctor

Strength: 3o

Regenerates. Whenever the Doctor retreats from battle, he gains 10 strength after the round (but this ability can't raise

him above 3o strength).

Melee: **Venusian Karate. id. If the karate damages an opponent, then you can force the enemy to retreat after this round:**

he chooses a new champion or loses the game.

Weapon: Distracting Things in Pockets. No damage, but long-range.

Hi-Tech: Sonic Screwdriver. Choose any attack listed on any of your other monsters. The screwdriver exactly copies that

attack, as if the Doctor had it, but it's now a hi-tech attack.

Ice Warrior

Strength: 3o

***Armoured.* Whenever dice are rolled to damage the Ice Warrior, minus r from each die.**

***Melee:* Clamp-Hands. 2d, smashes machinery.**

***Weapon:* Sonic Gun. 3d, long-range.**

Hi-Tech: Military Technology. One of your other monsters in the Zone (you choose) makes its hi-tech attack against the

enemy. However, the Ice Warrior takes any battle-damage.

Ice Lord

Strength: 3o

Armoured. Whenever dice are rolled to damage the Ice Lord, minus r from each die.

***Melee:* Military Command. One of your other monsters in the Zone (you choose) makes its melee attack against the enemy.**

However, the Ice Lord takes any battle-damage.

Weapon: Sonic Gun. 3d, long-range.

Hi-Tech: Sonic Cannon. If the enemy's using a weapon, then the cannon does 4d damage and the weapon is jammed.

Sea Devil

123

124

Strength: 3o

Weapons *Greater* Than Mankind's. If the Sea Devil is in the Zone, then whenever your champion rolls its dice you can re-roll

up to two of them.

Melee: Surprise Attack. 2d, smashes machinery. The Sea Devil can run straight after the attack.

Weapon: Heat Weapon. 3d, long-range. The Sea Devil can run straight after the attack.

Ni--Tech: Calling *Device.* id. You can then immediately replace the Sea Devil as "your champion.

Silurian

Strength: 3o

Hibernation. The Silurian doesn't take damage from enemy attacks while it's retreating.

***Melee:* Claws. id, or 3d if you're in a cave location.**

Weapon: Virus. Long-range. The enemy champion is permanently *diseased.* At the end of every round, a diseased monster

loses 2 strength. (A monster can be diseased several times over.)

Hi-Tech: Third Eye. id, or 4d if you're in a cave location. Jams weapons.

Sontaran

Strength: 35

Probic Vent Weak Spot. Whenever dice are rolled to damage the Sontaran, he takes 3 extra damage for every 6 that's rolled.

***Melee:* Loadbearing Strength. 2d, smashes machinery.**

Weapon: Hypnotic Beam. After this round, the enemy champion becomes your champion: your opponent chooses a new

champion or loses the game. After the next round, the opponent gets his champion back and the Sontaran becomes

your champion again.

Hi-Tech: Robot Servant. 4d, jams weapons.

Axon

Strength: 35

Shape-Changer. At the start of a round, you can choose to change the Axon's species: e.g. you can decide to make it a Dalek

or a Silurian (but this doesn't give the Axon any of that species' abilities).

Melee: **Flailing Tendrils. 2d, smashes machinery.**

Weapon: Axonite. 3d, and the Axon gains the same amount of strength the enemy loses.

Hi-Tech: *Strange Gaseous* Spray. 2d, jams weapons.

Quark

Strength: 4o

Needs Power. **If the Quark is your champion, then before players reveal their attacks you can announce that you're going to**

recharge it this round. If you do then the Quark doesn't make an attack (don't bother revealing your counter), but it

becomes fully charged.

Melee: **Clunky Arms. id, smashes machinery.**

Weapon: **Devastator. 7d damage. You can only use this weapon if the Quark has been fully *charged,* and the Quark is now un-**

charged again, even if the weapon gets jammed.

Hi-Tech: Radiation. 4d to all monsters in the Zone, except the Quark. Jams weapons.

Yeti

Strength: 4o

Territorial. If the Yeti's your champion at the start of the game, then you automatically control the first location where

battle takes place.

Melee: Claws. **3d, smashes machinery.**

Weapon: Web **Gun. 2d. If at least one of these dice comes up 6, then the enemy is paralysed and the Yeti gets a free attack**

after this round.

Hi-Tech: Web of Fear. Like the Web Gun (above), but jams weapons and does id.

Giant Robot

125

Strength: 45

Melee: **Stomp Beneath Foot. Does id for every 10 points of strength the Robot has. Weapon: Disintegrator Gun. 3d, long-range.**

Hi-Tech: Absorb Energy. If the enemy is attacking with a weapon, then the damage from that weapon is added to the

Robot's strength instead of taken away.

Dalek

Strength: 40

Limited Mobility. Can't run.

Melee: **Plunger-Arm. No damage, but smashes machinery.**

Weapon: **Dalek Gun. 4d, long-range.**

Hi-Tech: Mass Extermination. 4d, plus an extra 2d if there's at least one other Dalek in the Zone.

Gold Dalek

Strength: 4o

Limited Mobility. Can't run.

Melee: **Dalek Bodyguard. If the Gold Dalek takes any damage in this round, then you can choose one of your other Daleks (if**

you have one in the Zone). That Dalek gets a free attack after this round.

Weapon: **Dalek Gun. 4d, long-range.**

Hi-Tech: Time Vortex Magnetron. No damage, but jams weapons.

Dalek Supreme

Strength: 4o

Limited Mobility. Can't run.

Melee: **Dalek Bodyguard. If the Supreme takes any damage in this round, then you can choose one of your other Daleks (if**

you have one in the Zone). That Dalek gets a free attack after this round.

Weapon: Dalek Gun. 4d, long-range.

Hi-Tech: Dalek Battle-Computer. If the enemy is using a weapon, then that weapon has no effect on the Supreme but

affects the enemy instead.

Aggedor

Strength: 45

Animal Rage. If you choose to retreat while Aggedor is your champion, then roll a die. If it comes up r or 2 then Aggedor

refuses to back down, and remains your champion next round.

Melee: **Huge Great Claws. 5d, smashes machinery.**

Weapon: Horn in the Head. 3d, or 6d if the enemy is using a melee attack. Hi-Tech: No Technology. No damage.

Cyberman

Strength: 4o

Cybernetic Surgery. If the Cyberman is in the Zone, then at the start of any round you can choose two ofyour own monsters.

One of them loses 10 strength, and the other *gains* 5 strength.

Melee: Inhuman Strength. 3d, smashes machinery.

Weapon: Helmet-Beam. 2d, long-range.

Hi-Tech: Cyber-Bomb. 3d damage to all monsters in the Zone, including the Cyberman.

Locations

Scorched and Broken Plain

Thunderbolts are _everywhere._ During every battle, roll a die. If it comes up 4, 5 or 6 then both champions are hit by a

'thunderbolt' and take 7 damage (during the battle). However, if you control the plain then only the enemy takes the

damage.

Raston Robot's Cave

Ideal place for a Warrior Robot to keep its spare weapons and climbing equipment. If you control the cave, then roll id extra whenever

your champion rolls dice to damage the enemy.

Within the Dark Tower

Rassilon's _oppressive presence_ will muddy your mind. If you control the Tower, then all your champion's attacks will jam enemy

weapons.

High Ground

AV says the Cyberman, as it _spies_ its _enemies_ in the valley below. If you control the high ground, then all your champion's attacks are long-range.

Subterranean Cave

High risk of rockfalls and Yeti. If you control the cave, then all your champion's attacks will smash enemy machinery.

Booby-Trapped Hal way

It's as easy as pi. Before players choose their attacks in each round, roll a die. All monsters in the Zone take the amount of

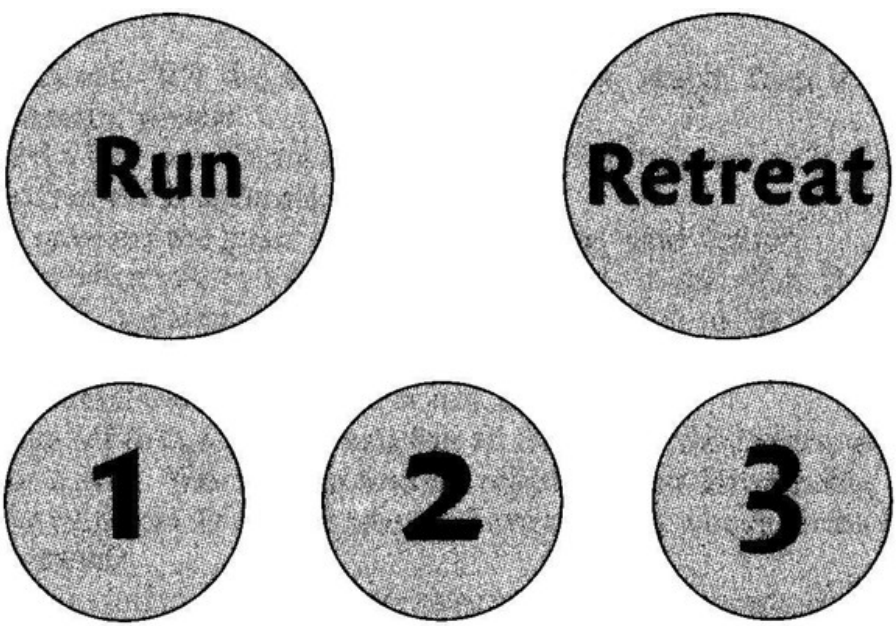
damage shown on the die. However, if you control the hallway then your champion doesn't take this damage.

Maze of Mirrors

Nobody knows why it's there, but it deflects Dalek blaster bolts. If you control the Maze, then whenever the enemy champion

makes an attack which fails (e.g. if its weapon jams or its machinery is smashed) the enemy takes the same amount of

damage that the failed attack normally does.



The Tomb of Rassilon

Im-m-m-ortality! If you control the Tomb, then at the start of each round you can roll one die. Your champion gains the

amount of strength shown on the die.

UNIT Christmas Parties:

Christmas Truce

Terrance Dicks

'I hate Christmas,' said Jo Grant moodily.

`So do I,' said Captain Yates. 'Always did.'

`Me too,' said Sergeant Benton.

There was a pre-Christmas lull at UNIT HQ. They were lounging about in the laboratory, drinking Mike Yates's special

Bunsen-burner-brewed tea, and annoying the Doctor, who was tinkering with a small yet complicated component of the

TARDIS's Time Vector Generator.

He looked up from hi129

s tinkering. 'You're a cheerful lot! Why do you all hate Christmas?'

Jo considered. 'It's the build-up. Promises so much, then it's always a disappointment. Always.'

Ì wanted a bike one Christmas,' said Mike. 'Set my heart on it. Know what I got? The Children's Encyclopaedia!'

'My girl gave me the push at a Christmas party,' said Benton.

Ìt's great when you're a little kid,' said Jo. 'It's magic then. But once you grow up a bit, it always seems a let-down.

Too much to eat and drink, and family rows over the Christmas turkey.' She looked at the Doctor. 'You wouldn't

understand. I mean, you're not...'

She broke off in confusion, realising all the things the Doctor wasn't. Not human for a start. Was God around on other

planets? Presumably, since He created the universe. Did other planets have saviours whose births had to be commemorated?

The Doctor smiled. 'Most planets have some kind of ceremony, around the winter solstice, Jo. Helps to cheer people up

when everything's at its darkest.'

The Brigadier marched into the room, brandishing a memo. Captain Yates and Sergeant Benton got to their feet and

came to attention. The Doctor and Jo, less disciplined, stayed perched on their lab stools.

The Brigadier looked round. 'The usual hive of industry, I see. Well, I'm glad you're all here. New directive from

Geneva.'

`Something exciting, sir?' asked Mike hopefully.

`Thrilling,' said the Brigadier dryly. 'Since last year's was such a success, this year we're to have an official Christmas

party. Geneva thinks it'll be good for morale. They're even sending a VIP to attend.'

He looked around the circle of blank faces.

`Well, I can see you're all highly delighted.'

`Who's the VIP, sir?' said Mike, perhaps feeling that he should show some interest.

The Brigadier consulted his papers. 'Chap called Fischer. Doctor Fischer. Arrives Heathrow tomorrow evening. Now

then, assignments.'

He looked thoughtfully at the group. They looked back apprehensively: all except the Doctor, who had returned to his

tinkering.

`Right,' said the Brigadier briskly. 'Sergeant Benton, you will pick up Doctor Fischer at Heathrow tomorrow evening. Take

my staff car.'

`How do I recognise him, sir? Have we got a photo?'

`Don't worry, Mr Benton, you'll recognise him. Apparently he bears a striking resemblance to a well-known

celebrity.'

`Really, sir? Who's that?'

Àccording to my colleague in Geneva, he's the image of Father Christmas! Now then, Captain Yates, you're our

Entertainments Officer.'

`Didn't know we had one, sir.'

`We do now, and you're it. You'll be responsible for organising the party, drinks, canapes and so on. Can't rely on an

alien spaceship turning up every time, can we? We'll use the mess, better get some decorations up.'

`Yes, sir,' said Yates, looking resigned. Jo remembered that he'd planned a candle-lit dinner in Soho with a young friend

of his. Looking as though a thought had struck him, he then said, 'Can we bring guests, sir?'

`Not unless they've got security clearance. Why?'

`Nothing, sir,' said Yates resignedly. The young friend in question probably had many attractions, thought Jo, but she

doubted high security was one of them.

`What about me?' she asked.

`You will be our hostess, Miss Grant,' said the Brigadier. 'Keep our VIP entertained.'

`Yes, sir,' said Jo sweetly. 'I'll see about hiring a bunny costume, shall I?' The Brigadier quelled her with a look and

turned to the Doctor. 'As for you, Doctor...'

'As for me, nothing,' said the Doctor without looking up. 'I'm not coming.' `But Doctor Fischer is particularly keen to

meet you, Doctor. He's some kind of scientist, you'll have a lot to

talk about.'

`Sorry, I'm far too busy.'

Ì'm afraid I must insist,' said the Brigadier rashly.

The Doctor's reacti130

131

on was entirely predictable. 'You can insist till you're blue in the face, Brigadier. My work on the

TARDIS has reached a crucial stage and I've no time to spare for your primitive junketings.'

`But you were entirely responsible for last year's —'

`Yes, well, those were my primitive junketings.'

`You are a serving member of UNIT —'

`Nonsense, I'm simply attached, and loosely attached at that. Just how loosely you'll find out if you're not careful.'

The Brigadier's frown became thunderous. 'You will attend the UNIT Christmas party, Doctor. That is a direct order.'

Ànd if I don't?'

`Then you can take the consequences. Mutiny is a very serious offence.' The Brigadier turned and marched from the

room.

There was an awkward silence.

`See,' said Jo, 'there's always a family row!'

Ìt's an intolerable imposition,' muttered the Doctor.

`Come off it, Doctor. You said yourself the winter solstice was celebrated throughout the universe.'

`So?'

`Surely you'd be attending some sort of celebrations if you were at home?' Wherever that is, she thought.

For a moment the Doctor didn't reply. Jo could see nostalgia on his face, as if mention of his home had sparked long-

forgotten memories.

Mike added his own persuasions. 'Come on, Doctor, team spirit. We're all in it together.'

`That's right,' said Benton. 'He's loused up all our Christmas Eve plans, why not yours as well?'

Reluctantly the Doctor grinned. 'Oh, very well. Captain Yates, you may inform the Brigadier that, work permitting, I

will show my face at the party towards the end of the evening.'

`Good show, Doctor,' said Mike. 'I'll go and tell the Brigadier he can cancel the firing squad.'

Next afternoon, Christmas Eve, Sergeant Benton stood behind the railing at the passenger arrivals gate at Heathrow

feeling foolish. The concourse was crowded with people going away, or coming home for Christmas, and with others

seeing the travellers off or welcoming them home. Around him people were holding up boards with names written on.

Benton had considered providing himself with something similar. He'd decided that a member of a secret organisation

had no business holding up a placard proclaiming the fact in public.

Now he was worried about missing his man. Travellers of all shapes and sizes were streaming by, but as yet no Santas.

The latest stream of arrivals came to an end and Benton was beginning to feel seriously worried. Then a solitary figure

appeared. Medium-sized, distinctly tubby, with a bushy white beard and a halo of white hair. All he needed was the

sleigh and the red-nosed reindeer.

Benton hurried to meet him. 'Doctor Fischer?'

The tubby figure turned. 'Yes, indeed. And you are from —'

Discreetly, Benton indicated his shoulder-flash. 'That's right, sir. Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart sends his compliments.'

`Thank you, thank you. I so look forward to meeting him.' Doctor Fischer's voice was deep and mellow, with a

pronounced German accent, or was it Swiss? 'And, of course, your scientific adviser, the so-famous Doctor.'

`He's very busy at the moment, sir, but I'm sure he'll be happy to meet you.' Benton hesitated, then made up his mind.

Better safe than sorry. He produced his UNIT ID. 'My credentials, sir. If I could just see yours?'

Òf course, of course. Security, eh? Most important.' The visitor produced a large laminated pass, not unlike Benton's

own. It bore a photo of a white-bearded figure and the words 'DOCTOR ALOYSIUS FISCHER, UNIT HQ GENEVA'.

Benson scrutinised the pass.

'Mies in ordnung, nicht wahr?' said the deep voice beside him. Benton looked down and saw the visitor's bright blue

eyes gazing up at him intently. Èverything is correct, not so? Everything is in *order*. You will take *me* to UNIT HQ to *meet the*

Brigadier and the Doctor.'

Benton blinked, then nodded, handing back the pass. 'All correct, sir.' He felt a sudden wave of affection for the tubby

figure beside him. What a fine fellow he was! Honest, trustworthy, a man you couldn't help liking. 'Come this way, sir.

Let me take your bag. The car's just outside.'

Doctor Fischer was a great hit at UNIT HQ. The Brigadier found him absolutely charming. So did Mike Yates and Jo

Grant. There was no chance to see the Doctor's reaction as he was still sequestered in his laboratory. The Brigadier

apologised on his behalf, but Dr Fischer couldn't have been nicer. As a fellow scientist, he understood completely. On no

account must the Doctor be disturbed. They would meet later, at the party. Meanwhile, how about a tour of UNIT HQ?

The Brigadier was happy to agree. Doctor Fischer wanted to see everything, and studied everything he was shown with

flattering interest.

Then it was time for the party.

Here, too, Doctor Fischer was a great success.

He complimented Mike Yates on the decor — some holly, a few sprigs of mistletoe and a few hastily assembled paper

chains — and said the canapes were delicious. He praised Jo's party frock, Benton's efficient collection service, and

congratulated the Brigadier on an excellently run HQ.

`Most kind, most kind,' muttered the Brigadier. 'Let me introduce you to some of your fellow guests...'

Some time later, with the party now well under way, the Brigadier glanced

surreptitiously at his watch. Still no sign of the Doctor. Not that Doctor

Fischer seemed bothered: he appeared to have forgotten all about him. All the

same... The Brigadier caught Jo's eye and silently mouthed 'Doctor'. Jo nodded understandingly and slipped away.

When she reached the Doctor's laboratory it seemed to be empty, and she wondered for a moment if he'd cleared off

somewhere. She went over to the TARDIS and rapped hard on the door. After a moment the Doctor appeared. `Yes?'

`Party time, Doctor!'

He scowled at her. 'Is it, indeed?'

`Come on, Doctor, stop sulking.'

`Me?' said the Doctor outraged. 'Sulking?'

`Sulking,' insisted Jo firmly. The Brigadier shouldn't have bossed you about, but you shouldn't have bitten his head

off. Try for some Christmas spirit.'

Reluctantly, the Doctor grinned. 'All right, Jo, I'll come.' He emerged from the TARDIS and closed the door. 'What's

he like, this Doctor whatsit? A boring bureaucrat?'

`Not a bit of it, he's charming,' said Jo enthusiastically. 'One of the nicest people I've ever met.'

The Doctor looked thoughtfully at her. 'Really?'

`Honestly, Doctor, you'll like him. He's charmed everyone, even the Brigadier.'

`Sounds too good to miss. All right, Jo, lead the way.'

When they reached the party, festivities were in full swing. Yates had supplemented Geneva's meagre party budget

with the mess funds and drink was flowing freely. The brightly lit room was filled with animatedly-chatting groups. The

largest, which included the Brigadier, centred around Dr Fischer, who was finishing an anecdote about diplomatic life in

Geneva. 'And the Minister said, "... but she told me she was a keen student of current affairs!"'

There was a roar of laughter. Better than the mild joke deserved, it was a tribute to Doctor Fischer's charm.

As the laughter died away, the Briagdier noted that Dr Fischer had become aware of the tall figure in the doorway. The

two men's eyes locked, and there was an odd little moment of

silence.

It ended and the babble of conversation resumed. Trailed by Jo, the Doctor made his way across the room to the central

group, his eyes fixed upon Dr Fischer.

`There you are at last, Doctor,' said the Brigadier. 'Allow me to introduce —'

Dr Fischer interrupted him. 'No need, no need, my dear Brigadier. The Doctor and I are old... well, it would be

presumptuous of me to say friends. Old acquaintances.'

Jo looked puzzled. 'You didn't say you knew each other, Doctor.'

Ì wasn't sure,' admitted the Doctor. 'Not until a moment ago.'

`The Doctor and I have encountered each other on a number of momentous occasions,' said Dr Fischer. 'We have much to

discuss. In fact...' He looked apologetically at the Brigadier. 'I wonder if we might be permitted to go somewhere quieter

for a private chat? I see you have a charming little terrace.'

Ìt'll be freezing

out there,' protested the Brigadier.

`Nonsense, Brigadier, merely bracing.' He patted his stomach. 'As you can see, I am well protected. And I know the Doctor

will not mind a little fresh air. Doctor?'

`Why not?' said the Doctor calmly.

`With your permission, Brigadier?' Dr Fischer took two champagne glasses and an already opened bottle of champagne

from a nearby table. He headed for the French windows on the far side of the room and the Doctor followed. Yates

hurried ahead to open the windows and the two of them went

out onto the terrace.

Òdd sort of behaviour,' said the Brigadier, getting slightly worried. 'Still, nothing surprises me where the Doctor's

concerned.'

The little terrace outside the mess was used for cocktail parties in fine weather. It was a pleasant enough place, despite

overlooking nothing more picturesque than the UNIT car park. Tonight it was dark and silent, chairs and tables folded away

and stacked by the wall. It was a clear, frosty night, and the winter sky was filled with stars.

Dr Fischer handed the Doctor a champagne glass and filled it from the bottle. He filled his own glass, put the bottle

down on the broad stone balustrade and took a swig of champagne. He glanced up at the stars. 'A long way to Gallifrey.

Your health, Doctor.'

The Doctor sipped his champagne, but he didn't return the toast. 'Now perhaps you'll explain the purpose of this

charade.'

`Come now, Doctor, it's Christmas. What could be more appropriate than a drink with a few old friends...'

`Come off it! You're about as sentimental as a Drashig. I take it the real Dr Fischer is now a three-inch ornament in your

TARDIS display cabinet?'

`Dr Fischer is alive and well and in my care. He will be released unharmed... as soon as I leave this HQ and issue the

instructions.'

The Doctor nodded. 'Typical. So why the masquerade?'

`Quite effective, isn't it? Still, I think it's served its purpose.' Dr Fischer clasped his hands to his stomach, which

somehow disappeared. He swept his hands over the bushy white beard and hair and they vanished in a puff of smoke,

leaving neat black hair and beard in their place. He passed a hand across his eyes, and blue eyes were replaced by

brown, so dark as to seem almost black. Even the suit moulded itself to the new spare form Immaculate as ever, the

Master bowed.

`Nice to see you again, Doctor.'

The Doctor stroked his chin. 'I can't say it's a pleasure, but it's certainly a surprise. For the last time, why are you here?'

Ì doubt if you'll believe me.'

`Try me,' said the Doctor grimly.

`Would you believe — nostalgia?'

`No.'

`Simple seasonal goodwill?'

Èven less so.'

The Master spread his hands in appeal.

`Think about it, Doctor. Here we are both stuck on this isolated, primitive planet, both exiles —'

`For very different reasons,' interrupted the Doctor. 'Me because I was unjustly condemned, you because you've made

the rest of the galaxy too hot to hold you.'

`Do you think my exile is any less bitter because I brought it upon myself?' snapped the Master with sudden passion. He

calmed himself. 'In any case, here we are — with nobody, nobody of equal intellect to talk to but each other.'

The Doctor made no reply.

`We were allies during that affair at Hob's Haven. I saved your

life.'

Ànd I saved your neck by persuading the Brigadier to let you go when it was all over. We're even now.'

`Precisely, Doctor. That's why I propose this Christmas truce. After all, we were friends once, in our younger days. You

remember all those nights in the Golden Grackle.'

Ì remember the night you picked a fight with six drunken Shobogans. We were lucky to get out alive.'

The Master picked up the champagne bottle and topped up the Doctor's glass and his own. 'To old times, Doctor?'

The Doctor hesitat 135

136

ed then raised his glass. 'To old times.'

The Brigadier looked around the crowded room. The party was still going with a swing, but the Doctor and Dr Fischer

still hadn't returned. He turned to Yates. 'What the devil are they chatting about all this time?'

`No idea, sir. These scientists...'

`They did seem to be old friends,' said Jo.

Ever since Dr Fischer's departure, the Brigadier had been haunted by a vague feeling of unease. 'Something odd's

going on...' He turned abruptly and headed for the French windows, Jo and Yates close behind him.

When he opened the French window and stepped outside, the Brigadier was amazed and appalled to see the Doctor and

the Master sipping champagne and, to all appearances, chatting amiably.

`Doctor, look out, it's him!' he shouted idiotically, and reached for the revolver that wasn't there. He turned to Yates.

'Turn out the guard! Seal the building.'

`No!' snapped the Doctor. 'Stay where you are, Mike. It's no use, Brigadier, he's holding the real Dr Fischer as a

hostage.' He turned to the Master. 'Time to go, I think. You'll keep your word about Fischer?'

Òf course, Doctor. Goodbye, Miss Grant, Brigadier, Captain Yates. A great pleasure to see you all again.'

Putting down his champagne glass, the Master turned and vaulted lightly over the balustrade. As he strolled across the

car park with insolent slowness, a gleaming Rolls Royce Silver Shadow slid out of the shadows. A smartly uniformed

chauffeur jumped out, saluted, and opened the rear passenger door. The Master got in, the chauffeur returned to the

driving seat and the big car drew away.

The Brigadier drew a deep breath. 'Doctor, what the devil's been going on?' Briefly the Doctor explained.

`Fischer was the Master all along?' asked Yates incredulously. 'I can't believe none of us recognised him.'

Ì thought he was lovely,' said Jo. 'We all did.'

The Brigadier shook his head in disbelief. 'I'd have sworn I'd recognise him in any disguise.'

The disguise was incidental,' said the Doctor. 'He was manipulating your minds, to make you like and trust him. Natural

charm boosted by hypnotism. Now then, Brigadier, don't stand there gobbling, we've got work to do. What happened before

I appeared at the party?'

`Benton collected him at the airport. I met him here, apologised for your absence.'

Ànd then?'

`He asked for a tour of HQ, so I gave him one.'

`Right,' said the Doctor briskly. 'Come with me please.'

He led them to his laboratory and disappeared inside the TARDIS, reappearing moments later with a familiar

torch-like device. 'The sonic screwdriver also functions as a scanner: it detects alien technology. Now then, Brigadier, you

must take me everywhere you took the Master. Everywhere, mind. Don't miss a single spot, all our lives may depend on

it.'

An hour later, they were all back in the laboratory surveying an array of complex-looking miniature devices, which the

Doctor had assembled on the lab bench. Three of them, kept separate from the others, the Doctor had carefully

dismantled.

The Doctor indicated the first group. 'These, Brigadier, as you've probably guessed, are miniaturised microphones and

cameras. With them in place, the Master could have seen and heard everything that took place in this building.'

Ànd the other three, the ones you took to pieces?'

`Thermonuclear devices. At any moment he could have destroyed the whole place by remote control.'

Àll planted right under my nose,' said the Brigadier bitterly.

`Don't feel badly, old fellow,' said the Doctor. 'The Master's a very tricky fellow. He can fool most people.'

`But not you, Doctor,' Mike pointed out. 'You recognised him at once. He must have known that would happen. He

knew you'd be here. Why did he take the risk?'

`Because he knows the Doctor,' said Jo. 'He knew the Doctor would be grumpy about going to the party, go late or

maybe not go at all. He gambled on having enough time to do his dirty work.'

Ì'm afraid you may be right, Jo,' said the Doctor. The Master and I have known each other for a very long time.'

Sergeant Benton appeared in the doorway. 'Report from Heathrow, sir. They've found a white-bearded, white-haired

bloke wandering about dazed, claims to be a Dr Fischer from Geneva with an appointment with UNIT.'

Ìs he all right?' asked the Doctor.

Àpparently. Just a bit confused, can't remember what happened.'

`Thank you, Sergeant Benton, I'll deal with it,' said the Brigadier. 'Come along, Mike, we've got a very tricky report to

write.' The three soldiers disappeared.

Jo wandered over to the Doctor. 'So the Master kept his word.'

`He has his own peculiar code of honour, Jo.'

She perched on a lab stool with her chin in her hands.

`You know what I think, Doctor? I think the Master was telling you the truth.'

`What about?'

Àbout wanting to have a drink with a few old friends. About having a Christmas truce with you.'

The Doctor waved towards the devices on the bench. 'What about all this?' took, he knew you'd turn up and recognise

him eventually. And he knew

you'd be suspicious and check up and find all the stuff he'd planted.' The Doctor nodded. 'I suppose so.'

`Don't you see? Planting all that stuff was just an excuse. He knew it wouldn't work, but he couldn't admit he felt

lonely and wanted a drink and a chat with an old friend. It would have ruined his evil reputation.'

It was an extraordinary theory, thought the Doctor. But then, the Master was an extraordinary character. It would be

very like him to present the truth as an obvious lie. And they had once been friends...

`You might be right, Jo,' he said at last. 'But I warn you, don't sentimentalise the Master. He's too dangerous for that.'

Àre you coming back to the party, Doctor?'

Ì don't think so, Jo. I've still got work to do... and I've already met the guest of honour!'

Jo went away, and the Doctor wandered over to the window. The sky was still filled with stars.

As the Master had said, it was a long way to Gallifrey.

He picked up the section of the Time Vector Generator and went back to work.

Animus, Zarbi, Menoptra

Jim Sangster

Animus, Zarbi, Menoptra is a party game played by the hatchlings on Vortis, similar to the traditional 'Paper, Rock,

Scissors' game now so popular with the Movellans, but on a larger scale. For this, you will need a large room or play

area, and enough people to be sorted into two roughly equal teams.

Instead of miming paper, rock or scissors, players mime either Animus, Zarbi or Menoptra and, depending on which

characters each team chooses, the winning team for that round must try to capture as many members of the opposing team

as they can.

Characters each have different performance styles:

Animus

Mime this by standing with your hands waving like the tentacles of a jellyfish while making a 'Mwaaaahr sound in a deep,

booming voice. Animus defeat Zarbi, but are defeated by Menoptra.

Zarbi

Stand with hands at the side of the head, like antennae, while going 'Bleep!' Zarbi defeat Menoptra, but are defeated by

Animus

Menoptra

Wave your arms slowly, like great wings, while making soothing Ò0000000h' noises. Menoptra defeat Animus, but are

defeated by Zarbi.

138

139

140

The two teams stand at either end of a room at their dens (an agreed safe area that is the same distance from the centre of

the room as their opposing team's den) and decide which character they are going to be.

So, team A might decide they will be Animus, while team B might pick Menoptra. Each team then takes turns to take a

step towards the centre, with a threatening count. So, one team walks forwards and counts 'One, two!', then the next

team steps forward and counts 'Three, four!' and so on until both teams have reached the centre of the room (best to

agree where this is before you start playing, or arguments might follow). At the middle zone, they all chant the next

number (so in this example, they would all shout 'Fiver) and then

quickly adopt the pose of their chosen character.

Once each team has struck their pose, it will be quickly obvious which way

each team must run. In this instance, as team A has taken the persona of Animus, this is a stronger character than team

B's — the Menoptra — so team B must flee to their den while team A give up their mime and try to catch as many team B

members as they can. Any captured team members now join their captor's team. The teams regroup, decide which

character to be and start another round.

The game continues until one team has captured every member from another team.

You should also agree before commencing play on how to capture opposing team members. For children or delicate

adults, a simple tap on the shoulder might be best. You might prefer to make it a little harder and say that to capture

someone, you must place one hand on each shoulder of your captive. For 'extreme' playing, you might want to insist that

the captor must wrestle their captive to the ground to capture them, though, as with all contact sports, you should be

careful not to be rougher than your captive can cope with.

Camilla's 0-Negative Mulled Wine

Paul Condon

If, like me, you find yourself running short of quality haemoglobin in the middle of winter (peasants can be so selfish

when it comes to hiding away during the cold months, don't you feel?), why not rustle up a quick batch of my best

plasma substitute? It's ideal for any guests you may have popping over, or for when the Great One wakes up and

demands a quick and nourishing gallon or two.

Ingredients

i bottle red wine (a strong, full-flavoured red wine such as Shiraz/Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon or Zinfandel is recommended)

1 orange

12-15 cloves

2 cinnamon sticks

1/2 pint/3ooml lemonade (optional — Sprite/7-Up style lemonade)

Method

Pour the red wine into a large saucepan. Prepare your orange by pushing the cloves into the outside of the orange's flesh,

in exactly the same way as you might push a red hot poker into a surly peasant. If the orange skin is a bit tough, make

holes for the cloves to sit in before pushing them into place. About a dozen or so cloves should do: add a few more if you'd

like your mulled wine to be especially zingy.

Now, add the clove-studded orange and cinnamon sticks to the saucepan and heat the mixture gently. Whatever you

do, don't allow the wine to boil: this will both ruin the flavour and evaporate the alcohol. Once the mixture is nearly at

boiling point, take the saucepan off the heat and leave it to settle for at least half an hour or so. Zargo and myself like to

leave our wine to cool off in the Hydrax's fuel tanks, but anywhere will do.

When you're ready to serve your mulled wine, remove the cinnamon sticks and orange from the saucepan and gently

reheat the liquid: blood warm is best. If you'd like the mixture to go a long way, or if you'd prefer your drink to be

slightly less potent, then add some lemonade to the saucepan at this point. When the wine is nice and warm, pour into big

red wine glasses and serve immediately. Best enjoyed with friends, and whilst listening to the sounds of peasants groaning

under the weight of their futile servitude.

Mrs Baddeley's Mini Christmas

Pudding Truffles

Paul Condon

141

142

Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without one of my plum puddings! They're the talk of the household here at Edward

Grove. However, not everyone's good enough to enjoy my plum pudding: that stupid girl Edith for instance. What with

her being dead, she's not been able to go and get all of the ingredients for me. Here's a quick substitute recipe that's

almost as tasty as my plum pudding, but a great deal quicker and easier to make. These truffles are great to have at home

in case visitors drop by, like those nice detectives the Doctor and Miss Pollard did. As I said to them: Christmas wouldn't

be Christmas without my plum pudding...!

Ingredients

6oz/r7og dried cranberries, cut into quarters 4 tbsp brandy, sherry or orange juice

6ozit7og unsalted butter

8oz/22og plain (dark) chocolate

26oz/74og ready-made ginger cake

Icing (confectioner's) sugar to serve

A pack of mini fairy-cake cases

Method

First of all, you'll need to prepare your fruits by soaking them in some liquid. Take your cranberries (if you can't find

cranberries, you could substitute raisins), and leave them to soak for half an hour in your liquid of choice. Now obviously,

brandy or sherry are the most festive options: however, if these truffles are to be served to youngsters or teetotallers, you can

always substitute orange juice or some other non-alcoholic beverage.

Next, you need to melt your butter and chocolate: either by popping them into that new-fangled 'microwave oven'

device for a few moments (don't trust it myself, I don't like the way it beeps at me), or by putting them into a glass bowl

suspended over a saucepan of boiling water. You'd better use quite a large bowl for this job, as you'll soon be tipping all

of the other ingredients into it! Once the butter and chocolate have melted together, take the cranberries and tip both

them and the liquid into the bowl. Give everything a good stir to make sure that the chocolate, butter and fruit are well

mixed together.

Now it's time to crumble in the cake. Break the cake up between your fingers so that only very small crumbs fall into

the bowl. I've suggested you use a shop-bought ginger cake, as that gives the best taste combination. If you can't find a

ginger cake, it's possible to use any other dark sponge cake: however, to get the proper 'Christmas pudding' flavour, I'd

suggest you add some ground ginger to the mix to your own taste. Carry on crumbling the cake into the bowl until all of the

chocolatey liquid and cake have combined. You might like to get a scullery maid to help you with this bit: after all, it's

probably time you had a cup of tea, isn't it?

At this point, you should put the bowl into your refrigerator for

about an hour to enable the mixture to solidify a bit.

Once it's firm to the touch, take the mixture and roll it into about 20 walnut-sized balls and place them into some small

fairy-cake paper cases. If you're feeling artistic, sprinkle some icing sugar (confectioner's sugar) on the top, et voila! A

perfect mini rendition of my famous Christmas Plum Puddings. After all, Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without my

plum pudding...

The Clanging Chimes of Doom

Jonathan Morris

The spacecraft Valentine ploughed through the inky wastelands of space, its engines blazing a furious cerise. Its surface

was covered in unblemished polymer mouldings that belied its awesome size.

143

At the head of the craft a single slit of glass peered out, illuminated from within.

Prince Tarvick hunched over the control panel, his thick-gloved fingers punching at the array of buttons. He gazed up at

the porthole, watching the stars glide towards him.

Tarvick,' a voice crackled through the intercom. 'We have you surrounded. Give yourself up.'

`Never, in the name of the 145

fourteen galaxies! Never, I say!' Tarvick ran a glove through his candyfloss-pink mane of

hair. An urgent beep-beeping from one of his oscilloscopes interrupted his thoughts. The oscilloscope screen showed

three green dots converging on a central green dot.

`This is your final warning. Surrender or we shall be forced to

unleash the warp torpedoes.'

`You ignorant imbeciles, you think mere warp torpedoes can stop me?' Tarvick spat. Although young and fresh faced,

he had the rancour of a man twice his years. He wiped the perspiration from his forehead. 'I am Crown Prince of Frentos.

I would rather die than surrender!'

`Counting down, then. Five, four —'

Tarvick laughed. 'I shall return. One day, I shall avenge my people!' `Two. One.'

Tarvick checked the oscilloscope. Each of the three green dots flared and detached a smaller green dot. These smaller

green dots scurried towards the centre of the screen. Tarvick drew in a breath of pure spite and stretched for the control

panel —

'You haven't seen the last of me —'

The warp torpedoes hit.

For an instant, the Valentine was consumed in a fuzzy, mauve circle. Then its surface buckled as it collapsed in upon itself.

A moment later and the spacecraft dissolved into hundreds of smouldering embers.

Èvery Time Lord should have a hobby,' said the Doctor with an indignant

swipe of his scarf. He kept his gaze fixed on the dip and rise of the central column of the TARDIS console.

Ìt just seems so pointless,' Romana sighed.

`Pointless?'

`You'd think a Time Lord could find better things to do with his time.' `Better things?' The Doctor boggled in

disbelief. 'What better things? How many planets have I saved

this week, hmm? How many?'

Èleven,' said Romana.

`Plus two space stations,' piped a prim, electronic voice from knee level. K9 whirred forward, his ears waggling

enthusiastically.

`Precisely, K9!' The Doctor adjusted some switches and pulled himself up to his fullest height. 'After saving eleven

planets and two space stations, I think I've earned some hobby time.'

Romana tugged her cuffs into her red-piped velvet jacket. 'But it serves no practical function.'

`That is the whole point of a hobby. Besides,' the Doctor rubbed his nose as he considered his next line, 'besides, it does

have a purpose. A-ha!'

Romana arched an expectant eyebrow.

The Doctor sniffed, then said, 'You know how, on occasion, I have been known to mention people I have happened

across, on my travels —'

Ònce or twice.' Romana crouched down beside K9 and rubbed his ears.

`— one bumps into so many fascinating characters. But-whenever I talk about people I've met —'

"Namedropping"?'

`-- whenever I talk about it, no one ever believes me.'

`Do you blame them?'

Ì remember dear old Oscar used to have the same problem.' The Doctor mused on this for a while, shrugged his scarf

into place, then said, 'I've met them all, you know. Shakespeare. Toulouse. Robin Hood. Cromwell. Anne Boleyn. Pretty

girl, nice neck...'

Romana sighed a heard-it-all-before sigh. 'Really?'

`Hence my new hobby,' said the Doctor. He rummaged in a capacious pocket and dug out a leather-bound book.

Without making eye contact, he slapped it on the console as afait accompli.

Romana leafed through it. All the pages were blank. 'Autograph collecting?' The Doctor gave a vigorous nod before

returning his attention to the undulations of the central column. 'Autograph collecting.'

`Whenever you meet someone famous, they put their name in your book?'

`To prove that I've met them,' said the Doctor. 'Not just their names. They can leave messages. "To Doctor, I owe it all

to you, Pliny the Elder". "To Doctor, thanks for the tunes, Johann".'

Ìt seems so... trivial.' Romana indulged him with a smirk. 'But if it keeps you out of trouble —'

Èxactly. We've had eleven planets and two space stations of trouble.' The Doctor checked the dials on the console as it

gave the telltale gut-wrenching sound that heralded a materialisation. 'We deserve some fun!'

`So where are we going?'

`To start my collection,' the Doctor announced. 'At the best autograph-collector's opportunity... in the galaxy!'

Leaves sifted and scuttled in the breeze. Reflections of the orange dawn blazed in the windows of the narrow, Victorian

houses. The air was brisk and heavy with expectation.

The Doctor strode through the drizzled streets of Notting Hill Gate, his body hunched with purpose. He paused at the

end of one avenue to frown at a well-thumbed A-Z, his breath freezing in the crisp autumn smog. Then, without looking

up, he rounded a corner. 'A-ha... Here we are, Doctor!'

A small group of photographers had gathered outside the recording studio, each buried in a fleece coat. Bulky cameras

swung from their necks.

As the Doctor approached, a limousine crunched up on the pavement. Before it had halted, the passenger door swung

open and a short, puppy-faced man emerged. He blinked in surprise at the awaiting press, then put on a smile, running

a hand back through his spiky blond highlights.

The Doctor watched him jog up the steps to the main door. Without acknowledging the reporters, the Doctor

bounded after him, shoving aside the door and exchanging the cold November morning for the carpeted warmth of

the reception area.

`Sorry.' The security guard rose from behind his desk. He cleared the gravel from his throat. `No politicians —'

The Doctor halted. 'I'm sorry?'

`No politicians. No Tories, no Labour. No SDP.'

The Doctor bashfully brushed aside his fringe. Àh, no. I'm not her, you know. It's not the first time I've been mistaken

—'

Ìf you're not famous,' said the guard. 'You're not getting in.'

`Famous? I'm the Doctor!'

`Never heard of you.'

The Doctor leaned over his desk and fixed him with two large, bulging eyes. He whispered conspiratorially, 'I am

terribly famous and you have heard of me.

The guard remained in a trance for some seconds, then shook himself awake. 'Yes, of course. The Doctor. Please go

straight though —'

The Doctor nodded his thanks and swung open the inner doors, where a grimy corridor and an airlock of sliding

doors led him to the control room. The hush inside was tangible.

A tape scriddled backwards. Three men sat at the mixing desk. 'We'll go again,' coughed one into the microphone.

'From "bells".'

Through the window a figure nodded and adjusted a music stand. A film crew shifted their camera tripod to a better

vantage point.

One of the other men at the desk was on the phone. He held a hand over the receiver. 'Aubrey Waites can't make it. We'll

have to give his line to someone else —'

The third man made meticulous adjustments to the row of knobs in front of him then tapped down two switches. The

tape machine clicked into life. Òkay, take. . six —'

The room was filled with a thudding, morose synthesiser backing track. A husky, soulful voice echoed out of nowhere.

Ànd the Christmas Bells that ring there...'

Romana rested against the control console as she watched the scanner, her arms folded. On the screen, in washed-out

video, a man with the hair of an exotic lovebird crooned into a microphone, his eyes closed in concentration, his hands

clasping his earphones to his ears.

`This is what passes for music on Earth?' said Romana haughtily. Àffirmative, mistress.'

`They're hardly the Hot Five. Back on Gallifrey that would be lucky to scrape the top twenty. The harmonic

counterpoints are positively archaic.'

K9 whirred in agreement.

The picture changed to a gathering of forty people, grouped in four rows, each row a step higher than the one in front.

It put Romana in mind of the sleeve of an album in the Doctor's collection. Pakafroon Wabster's Broken Soul Gang

Orchestra. The camera panned across the assemblage of smiling faces.

`Who are they?' asked Romana.

Àccessing databanks. Earth. Popular culture. 1984. The crowd consists of —'

`They're all famous?'

Àffirmative.'

Romana raised an eyebrow. 'Who's that in the back row?'

`Mistress?'

`Third from the right. You can't miss him. Bright pink hair.'

`Does not correspond to any figure in my pop fact data-bank.'

`K9, you have a pop fact data-bank?'

Àffirmative, mistress. The master likes me to set him quizzes.'

Romana shook her head in disbelief. 'If they're not famous... what are they doing there? I have a bad feeling about this.'

The recording had finished and hands were being shaken. Paper cups of

warm champagne were passed around, drunk and crumpled into bins. An

atmosphere of camaraderie, of jollity, of Christmas filled the air. The film

crew checked the gates of their cameras and folded them into padded grey cases.

The Doctor peered through the glass into the main studio. His reflection brooded back.

`That went all right, don't you think, Doctor?' said one of the producers, tugging on his jacket. The studio had emptied

and the party had reconvened elsewhere.

The Doctor nodded. 'It will do very well.' He turned to the producer and offered him his leather-bound book. 'Could

you sign this?'

He nodded and scribbled something. When he returned the book to the Doctor, the Time Lord was preoccupied with

the window again. 'What is it?'

By way of a reply, the Doctor tapped on the glass. Inside, one of the singers remained, waiting; a man with a shock of pink

hair. 'Who's he?'

`Not sure. Has he signed your book?'

No,' frowned the Doctor. `So, you say you don't know who he is?'

`Why not ask him yourself?' He swung the door shut after him, leaving the Doctor alone in the control room.

The Doctor nodded and made his way through the airlock of slide-doors

into the main studio. The pink-haired man looked up as he approached. `Hello,' beamed the Doctor. 'I was just

wondering... who are you?' The man eyed the Doctor. 'You don't know?'

`Well, I'm not from this time, you see —'

`You're from the future?'

`Sometimes,' said the Doctor. 'When I'm not from the past, ah...'

Ì knew it,' exclaimed the man. 'I knew you'd come!' He grabbed the

Doctor's hand and shook it vigorously. 'It's me you've come to find. It's me!

Prince Tarvick of the planet Frentos!'

`The planet Frentos?'

Ìn the fourteenth galaxy,' K9 repeated in his primmest tones. 'Prince Tarvick fled following the republican uprising

—'

`Then what,' Roma 149

15

n 0a interrupted, 'is he doing in a "pop video"?' Ìnsufficient data.'

Èxactly, K9. Insufficient data.' A persistent bleeping filled the air. A series of indicators on the console flashed in

sequence. 'What —'

K9 trundled over to the console and extended his probe. `Chrono-historical stress gauge detects disturbance in the

space-time continuum.'

`Not again.' Romana rather regretted allowing the Doctor to plug the gauge into the console. 'What sort of

disturbance?'

`Convergent time spirals, mistress.'

`You mean someone is travelling through time... to here?'

Àffirmative. Sensors also indicate —' K9 cleared his throat for dramatic effect, the Doctor is involved.'

`Well, that goes without saying,' muttered Romana as she activated the door control. 'He invariably is...'

Ì realise it's a silly question, probably.' The Doctor rubbed his forehead. 'But I'll ask it anyway. What are you, ah, doing

here?'

Ì was forced to flee from Frentos following the republican revolt.' Tarvick collected a stool and perched upon it. 'Whilst

making my escape, the Valentine was struck by warp torpedoes. My escape podule was caught in a dimensional eddy and

flung back in time.'

Ùnlucky,' sympathised the Doctor.

Ì found myself marooned on this world. I have spent the last four years attempting to "blend in".'

`Bit tricky, I'd imagine, with the hair.'

`Not really. Fortunately this is an era where pink hair is unremarkable.' The Doctor took a stool. let me rephrase

the question. What are you doing... here?' He indicated the studio.

Ì estimate that this planet is one hundred and twenty light years from Frentos. The uprising occurs some fifty years

in the future. Therefore, any video signals broadcast from this planet will reach Frentos approximately seventy years

after my departure.'

`Go on.'

`By that time,' said Tarvick. 'There will have been another rebellion on Frentos, deposing the republican scum who

deposed me! The indolent fools!' He swallowed. 'They will then receive the video signals from Earth, determine my

location in time and space and send someone back through time to collect me.'

À Mayday!'

`Yes. But you know this, as you answered my call...'

Àh, yes, well...' The Doctor flapped his scarf. 'The thing is... why appear in the video for Do They Know It's Christmas?'

Ìt was the most logical course. In order to make sure that the people of Frentos would locate me, I would have to appear

in something that would be broadcast as frequently as possible.'

Òf course,' said the Doctor. 'It was, as you say, the most logical thing.' Ànd now you are here, to restore me to the

throne of Frentos!'

Ì knew you'd mention that,' said the Doctor. 'You see, ah, I'm just here for

autographs.'

Àutographs?'

Ìt's a hobby —'

Suddenly the door to the studio slid open and Romana dashed in, K9 at her heels, his motors whinnying painfully.

'Doctor,' said Romana breathlessly. `He isn't a pop star. He's Prince Tarvick —'

Ì know all that, I know,' said the Doctor. 'He's explained everything.'

Ì've come to warn you. About the convergent time spirals —'

`Convergent time spirals!' The Doctor leapt to his feet. 'You mean —' `Someone is on their way...' Romana said

darkly.

As she spoke, the air rippled. Three shapes shimmered into existence, surrounded by a golden halo. Three figures

protected by thick, black armour. Steam hissed from the glistening metal.

One of the figures stomped forward. Its red visor scanned to and fro, and alighted upon Tarvick. 'We have come for

you,' crackled a deep, electronic voice. 'We are from Frentos one hundred and twenty years in the future.' It raised a

bulbous laser rifle.

Romana drew in a breath. 'Doctor —'

The figure lowered the rifle. 'Following a royalist revolution against the junta, we have come to restore you to your

rightful throne. Prince Tarvick!' The other two figures dropped to their knees. 'Prince Tarvick!'

Tarvick beamed with delight. Then his smile fell.

Three more figures had materialised. Their golden halo faded and they stepped forward as one. They also wore thick,

black armour that hissed with steam. 'We come from Frentos one hundred and fifty years in the future,' their leader

announced. 'Where there has been another revolution. The royalists have been removed from power and a new republic

has been established.' He aimed his rifle. 'We have come to execute the traitor Tarvick —'

Before he could finish, another three figures materialised behind him. 'We come from Frentos two hundred and ten

years in the future,' their leader announced. 'Where there has been another uprising against the second republic. We

have come to prevent the execution —'

Three more figures appeared. 'We are from Frentos three hundred and eight years in the future from the glorious third

republic. We have come —'

`We hail from Frentos four hundred and seven years in the future. Following the fall of the glorious third republic, we

have come to prevent the prevention of the prevention of the execution of the traitor Tarvick.'

There was a brief pause during which no more thick, black armoured figures materialised. The Doctor took

advantage of the silence to raise one hand, as though making a recitation, and shout at the ceiling, 'Any more for any

more?'

`Doctor, this is going to take some sorting out,' Romana whispered. 'Any decision we make now could have appalling

consequences for the web of time.'

`Yes, we must be very, very careful.' The Doctor strode over to Tarvick and handed him his autograph book. 'You

wouldn't sign this for me, would you?'

`So where did you drop Tarvick in the end?' asked Romana.

The Doctor's gaze remained fixed on the TARDIS's central column. He absently adjusted some switches. 'A period in

the history of Frentos where

they didn't care about Prince Tarvick one way or the other. In fact, they'd never heard of him. He'll be happy there, I think.

Safe.'

`But no one will know who he is!' Romans protested.

The Doctor mused on this. 'No, they won't. But fame isn't everything. Ah...' Ìsn't it?'

`No,' the Doctor raised his voice. 'Besides, he'll have a form of immortality on Earth. For years to come, people will

watch that video and ask each other, "Who is that person at the back, third from the right?"'

`That's hardly the same thing.'

`Well, no, but...' the Doctor's face broke into a grin, 'fame is

pointless, after all.'

Ìn that case,' said Romana, 'why go around collecting autographs?'

Àh, well, you see, every Time Lord should have a hobby,' said the Doctor, and grinned the toothiest of grins.

On Being Five

Jo Fletcher

Is it time yet, is it, Mummy

I've been waiting all the week.

Tied my laces, tidied toys up,

Sat through Church without a squeak.

(It wasn't me who dropped the sweeties

Or who kicked the verger's seat.

Honest, Mummy! I am five.)

153

152

I've washed my hands — look, all pinky;

Cleaned my teeths, every day,

I've got my duckie 'jamas ready

And I put my books away.

(It wasn't me who spilled the shampoo

Or who washed the fish away.

Honest, Mummy! I am five.)

Mummy, Mummy, please come quickly,

I can't reach it; it's too hard.

We've got to give it time to warm up

Otherwise we'll miss the start.

(It wasn't me who knocked the plant off,

Or who pulled the plug apart.

Honest, Mummy! I am five.)

Mummy, tell her mine's the blue one,

I'm the one who found the pack.

I hate yukky red and yellow,

Mummy, make her give it back.

(It wasn't me who tipped the full box

Into the kitchen rubbish sack.

Honest, Mummy' I am five.)

Mummy, listen, now it's starting,

I can hear the duddle-leh song.

Duddle-leh-duh, duddle-leh-duh, duddle-leh-duh, duddle-leh-duh

It's fun when we all sing along.

(I'm not shiv'ring 'cause I'm frightened,

It's not even been on long.

Honest, Mummy! I am five.)

Mummy, Mummy, there's the Dalek!

Just like my blue one, look, the same!

Where's the Doctor? Is he deaded?

Exterminate! *We* play that game.

(It wasn't *me* who 'sterminated

Dulcie's rabbit; she's to blame.

Honest, Mummy! I *am five.)*

I'm not hiding, I'm not frightened,

It's just because it's warmer here.

There's a draught coming from the kitchen

The sofa stops it coming near.

(It wasn't me who left the light on

All last week because I'm 'feared:

Honest, Mummy! I am five.)

Mummy, listen — what's that knocking —

Are there Daleks at the back?

'

Did they come through the television?

Will they 'sterminate us flat?

(It wasn't me, it's *her* who's worried

I am not a scaredy-cat.

Honest, Mummy! I am five.)

MUMMY, I CAN HEAR THEM BREATHING!

I THINK THEY'VE KILLED THE DOCTOR DEAD!

THERE'S NO ONE NOW TO COME AND SAVE US!

What? No! Me? No! Go to bed?

It *wasn't* me who started shouting,

She's the one soft in the head.

Honest, Mummy! I am five.)

Mummy, how long is it now, then?

Till the Doctor comes back on?

***Seven* days! That's half my lifetime.**

Mummy, I can't wait that long.

If I'm really good this next week

Can I watch Doctor Who alone?

Honest, Mummy! I am five!

Perfect Present

Andy Campbell

Snowflakes drifted endlessly down from the *blackness of the heavens;* each moment a *few would* land against *the* windowpane of the old Provost's Lodge with a hypnotic ticking sound. Inside, the flickering *orange glow from* the log fire il uminated the faces of the occupants, throwing each into a *state of* continuous melting transition: the young *eager faces* of half a dozen students, and the benign *face of the*

***ageing* scholar *whose* invitation to share Christmas Eve had been so keenly accepted.**

'It feels more like Christmas, now the snow has come,' Somerton said.

'It puts me in mind of another Christmas Eve,' the old scholar said; and that was what the students had *come* to hear.

'What happened?' *asked* Fanshawe.

'It is a dark story,' *said* the scholar, and he *nodded* towards the window, against which *the* fragile snowflakes pattered and *slid.*

'Darker than that little square of blackness you *see* there. It might *change* you.'

'Tell us,' *urged* Wardrop.

The scholar pushed his gold-rimmed spectacles a little higher up the *bridge of* his nose, and without the *need for* further prompting, he told his story.

Some peculiar events took place on Christmas Eve in the year Igo —, a Saturday, if I remember rightly. A very old

friend of mine, a travelling doctor, had been staying for a few days at Betton Court – perhaps you know it – a lovely old

manor house not far from B—, surrounded by countryside whose beauty is almost unparalleled anywhere in England. Now

this Doctor was the guest of the Montague family; or, to be more precise, the two most recent generations of Montagues,

the family having owned and dwelt in the house since the late seventeenth century. A charming little fellow, the Doctor:

a quick-witted chap, far sharper than many ofhis acquaintances gave him credit for. He spoke with a Scottish accent, I

recall, though he assured me he was not from Scotland.

Recuperation after the strain of recent solitary travels was the Doctor's declared reason for his visit; but he had a

further reason, and that was to check on the welfare of the current occupants of the house. For he had been at Betton

once before, and on that occasion he had encountered, and indeed done battle with, an entity quite outside the realm of

mundane experience; and his struggle had not been without cost. That first visit had been a century earlier, in the

Christmas of 18o— 155

156

– don't look so perplexed, Mr Fanshawe, I did not say the Doctor was a young man – and since it was

in his nature to

dislike loose ends, the Doctor was anxious to ensure that the family he had once preserved from catastrophe had

survived happily for a further century.

The Montagues were a delightfully hospitable couple bordering on middle age — Lord Herbert and Lady Mary were their

names — unspoiled, unusually perhaps, by their aristocratic way of life. They had three young children: George, who was

eight years old, Ann, who was six, and little Sarah, who was four.

For some while the Doctor was content to observe the family apparently enjoying an idyllic life in their beautiful old

house. But a shadow had lately fallen over the family, the more disturbing for its nebulous character; and on the snowy

afternoon of the twenty-fourth of December, the Doctor, perceiving that something was wrong, despite all the family's well-

meaning efforts to conceal the truth from him, met Lord Montague in his well-appointed study and enquired what the

difficulty might be which had cast such a cloud over the family's happiness. The Doctor was familiar with all kinds of

unnatural unpleasantness — he was a man of very varied experience — and his face grew gradually more concerned as he

listened to his friend's reply.

`Strange occurrences have been intruding upon the tranquillity of Betton Court these last few weeks, Doctor,' Montague

said. 'And to say truly— though of course I attribute this to mere coincidence — these events have undoubtedly gathered pace

since you came to stay with us. It is rather difficult to speak of, but to cite just one example: do you recall the old yew-

tree maze in the grounds of the house? It is a fine example of its kind, which I know you admired upon your arrival. About

ten days ago — a day of heavy snow — my wife was playing with our elder daughter, Ann, in the maze. For a while Mary lost

sight of Ann, though she could still plainly hear her laughter;

then without warning she heard our daughter's delighted

giggles give way to a scream of sheer terror. Imagine for yourself, Doctor, the distress my poor Mary suffered as she

pushed her way desperately through the overgrown hedges of the maze — making several false turns — before finally

arriving at the path where Ann was standing and shivering uncontrollably, her little hand outstretched to indicate a fresh

trail of footprints in the snow. Huge they were, each showing the impression of seven great claws; and — this is the

intolerable part —unquestionably made by a creature walking on two legs rather than four.'

`Go on,' said the Doctor thoughtfully.

Ìn the bedrooms we have found many garments dragged from the wardrobes and strewn haphazardly about the

floor,' said Lord Montague. 'All this clothing has been found soaking wet, and, strange to relate, we have found it quite

impossible to dry out. Our Christmas tree has been curiously pruned, carved into a grotesque asymmetrical form; I

believe my children when they plead their innocence of the act, for both vandalism and dishonesty are alien to their

natures; and our servants have all been carefully chosen and are likewise above suspicion. My library, once such a

source of pride and

delight to me, I now scarcely dare to enter: several times over the past few days I have found historical texts lying open,

always at the same pages, and those pages defaced with indecipherable symbols. And the little house...'

Here Lord Montague faltered and rubbed his eyes. The Doctor gently encouraged him to continue.

À dolls' house,' he said at length. 'Our Christmas present to Sarah. For the past week Mary and I have kept it hidden in

our bedroom with the intention of presenting it to our daughter tomorrow. It is... changing. Very slowly and subtly, and

never whilst under our observation. Its interior decor was originally brown: daily it grows whiter. Tiny circular

impressions are appearing on the interior walls.'

Ì see,' said the Doctor with a frown. His chin was resting on one hand, and his sparkling blue eyes were fixed intently

on Montague, as if he were anxious not to miss the merest clue that might be gleaned from his friend's facial expression.

'Tell me: could it be there is something else that troubles you even more?'

Montague looked surprised at the Doctor's insight. 'Well,' he said, 'in spite of all these happenings, I must confess that

what disturbs me most is the behaviour of my own dear children. Naturally each of them has been excited by the

notion of Christmas from the moment of reaching an age to understand its meaning But this year their

anticipation has become nothing short of .. feverish. For the past few days they have been endlessly telling Mary and me

that they have glimpsed "Father Christmas" about the house. They see him everywhere, they say, even little Sarah says

it. They have caught sight of him in all parts of the house, slipping from room to room, although it seems they have

never quite been able to see his face.'

At this moment the interview was interrupted by the noisy arrival of the three Montague children, chirruping

excitedly about their most recent sighting of 'Father Christmas'. At this confirmation of his account, Montague looked

sad and defeated.

`These signs...' said the Doctor pensively.

`Signs?'

`Yes. These remarkable... occurrences. Will you show me?' And the Doctor's eyes sparkled with such keen intelligence

that Lord Montague felt persuaded to trust the little man, as his great-great-grandfather once had.

The afternoon was darkening into evening as the Montagues took the Doctor on a tour of the huge house and its

extensive grounds, pausing to show him the evidence of each supernatural visitation. The vast clawed footprints were

still intact; they had either survived recent snowfall or been replaced by a fresh treading of the maze by whatever was

capable of producing them. His face lined with concern, the Doctor knelt down to peer at the Imprints and prodded

them cautiously with the handle of his umbrella. Back in the house, the wet clothing, as Lord Montague had indicated,

defied all

attempts to dry it out: to his consternation the Doctor's careful experiments with oil-stove and coal fire produced

nothing but limitless steam. The defaced books in the library, the deformed Christmas tree, and most especially the

dolls' house, were all narrowly examined; but still no explanation was procurable.

The Doctor turned the information over and over in his mind, closing his eyes from time to time to aid his

concentration, and increasingly feeling (I venture to speculate) an unaccountable pressure to resolve the mystery

promptly, before Christmas Eve should turn into Christmas Day.

Some time later, in the large and exquisite oak-panelled drawing

room, Lady Montague was attempting with diminishing

success to keep the children's excitement under control, while the Doctor and Lord Montague considered each bizarre

manifestation from every angle. First the Doctor would seek clarification, showing an almost obsessive concern with

apparently irrelevant detail; then he would ruminate for a while; then he would question his friend afresh. The puzzle

defeated Montague in spite of his Cambridge education. But the Doctor was an astute man, and shortly after eleven

o'clock his eyes cleared and he breathed the name which encapsulated his solution to the entire problem: 'Klaus.'

`What did you say?' asked Montague.

`Tell me, have you read much of your family's history?' the Doctor asked. Ònly what I have discovered in the library,'

said Montague. 'You mean the events of 180--...?'

Ì was there,' said the Doctor. 'I was a friend then, as well as now.' `But you aren't —'

Òld enough? Listen to me, Herbert. I was here a hundred years ago: exactly a hundred years ago tonight. On that

night there was an appalling threat to this whole county, perhaps to the world, an infestation which originated far, far

away, driven by an intelligence that cares nothing for compromise. I found a way to stop it, but there was a price. There

usually is.'

The background chatter of the children, and the harassed pleas of Lady Montague for them to settle down, seemed

to grow fainter as Montague uttered the question: 'Who was Klaus?'

`Klaus was in service to the Montague family at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a footman to your great-

great-grandparents. That young man was a great help to me, and a good friend. He died protecting me, and your

ancestors. He prided himself on his loyalty to the Montague family.'

`He died,' Montague repeated in a whisper, weighing the statement gravely.

À century ago tonight,' said the Doctor, and he looked at the ornate ormolu clock ticking away on the mantelpiece.

'Almost to the minute.' His gaze lowered from the clock to the hearth, where the last embers of the coal fire were

fading. Soot trickled gently from the chimney above.

`What connection has Klaus with any of this?' Montague asked. 'He's been dead for a hundred years.'

`He's been somewhere,' said the Doctor cryptically. 'Exactly where, we might better leave to the metaphysicians I think he

feels he has something to say to me.'

Montague shook his head resolutely. 'No, no, Doctor, I can't — I won't believe in ghosts.'

`What about discorporeal cognitive energy? I have seen the like, believe me.' Ì don't —'

Ìt was a terrible death,' said the Doctor with infinite sadness. 'And not just its nature: its timing Klaus was a young

man, scarcely twenty years old. He should have lived, and if he had, he would have travelled with me. I can see that now.

He would have travelled with me for a very long time. That nightmarish adventure should have been only his first,

and he knows it. As far as Klaus is concerned, he's been cheated of a whole series of wonderful life-affirming experiences.

He's burning with anger and despair. In a hundred years he's forgotten all other emotions.'

Soot rattled noisily down the chimney and spread in dusty clouds

in the fireplace.

15

169o

`So many things I have had to do alone,' said the Doctor. 'Those footprints in the maze, for example: unquestionably

the footprints of Stalkers. There's really no mistaking the species, although I have tried hard enough to forget them.

Ravenous beyond imagination,' he added, extravagantly rolling the initial `r'. 'No human has ever dreamt of such

things. I battled them on a remote world. Klaus should have been with me; he should have fought them too.'

A single chime from the clock on the mantelpiece indicated half past eleven.

The wet clothing,' said the Doctor. 'Symbolising a world — a real place, Herbert — where a collapsing technological

civilisation was overwhelmed by cataclysmic floods. And the deformed Christmas tree, cut to resemble a particular

aggressive vegetable species.'

Ì never heard of such a thing!' Montague exclaimed.

`You will,' said the Doctor sourly. 'Your people will. But not for a while.' Ì don't understand, Doctor. The future

hasn't happened yet.'

Ànd the history books,' said the Doctor, ignoring Montague's point. Àlways opened at the same pages, you told

me. All the periods of Earth history I've recently visited... alone. Klaus should have been with me to witness them, to

share them.'

Ànd the dolls' house?' asked Montague.

Ì should have thought of it earlier,' said the Doctor. 'After all, the

TARDIS should have been his home.'

With a deafening crash that elicited shrieks of alarm from the children, a great mass of soot dislodged itself from the

chimney and roared down into the

fireplace, propelling churning black clouds into the drawing room. The Doctor and the five Montagues watched

mesmerised as a thick and filthy human leg extruded from the chimney and waggled above the fireplace.

And that is what happened,' said *the* old scholar. 'I *do hope* you didn't find it too disturbing. But you *see,* if such *events* take place, I

feel* duty-bound to report them, grotesque and inexplicable as they may sometimes *seem.'

`But that can't be it!" protested Somerton.

`What do you mean?' asked the scholar.

'What about *the* Doctor?' asked *Fanshawe.* 'What about thefamily?'

`What about them?'

`Wel , what on earth *happened* to them?'

The scholar *gazed* around *the group* of students as if reaching a *decision.* 'Very wel ,' *he conceded at length. 'There* was something *more.'*

The children, followed by their parents, fled screaming as the apparition from the chimney dragged itself clumsily into

the room. The Doctor alone remained to face it, gazing steadfastly at the visitor through billowing clouds of soot.

It was Father Christmas, but something had gone badly wrong. The heavy body was dressed in the comical red-and-

white outfit in which the character had a million times been depicted, but the outfit was filthy, and not just with debris

from the chimney: it was crawling with mould. The face, sunk in

permanent shadow, grimaced in rage and pain; the

yellow eyes glowed brighter than any wolf's.

`Hello Klaus,' said the Doctor. 'I'm very sorry.'

The creature shambled toward the Doctor, raining soot and filth.

`The last adventure you would have experienced at my side,' said the Doctor gently. 'I know what would have happened: it

should have been your greatest triumph. You would have freed a slave colony, Klaus. A colony of children, worked to

death on their own planet. You would have liberated them from vicious exploitation, and without much help from me.

That's why you feel this affinity with Father Christmas, isn't it? The children's friend?'

The visitor halted its advance and leered down into the Doctor's face. A terrible scowl of fury deformed its features

into those of a more extreme creature; it was relinquishing its tenuous grip on humanity by the second. It stank, with the

deep unbearable reek of agony and despair. As a fresh wave of emotional torment coursed through its body, tiny

fragments of flesh disengaged from its face and showered down onto the Doctor's. The Doctor closed his eyes and

reached out his arms to embrace the creature.

`Take the memories,' the Doctor said. 'Take them all, Klaus.' While the Doctor clung to the body of the creature, their

minds met somewhere far from the Montagues' drawing room. When the transfer was complete, the Doctor

remembered nothing of his most recent achievements; but Klaus remembered them all. They were Klaus's

memories now: they always had been.

The Doctor felt the creature in his arms becoming less substantial, and opened his eyes to see the bulky Father-

Christmas body gently shedding its mass into the air. Gradually it dispersed into nothingness, accompanied by the

sound of Klaus's l

16

16

ong, 13

long sigh of relief.

'My perfect present to you, Klaus,' said the Doctor. 'Sleep well: it's the best I can do for you.' As the clock chimed

midnight, he added, 'Happy Christmas '

And now there really is nothing further to relate,' the scholar said. 'The family were fine; in fact, I *believe* their *descendants* inhabit Betton Court to this day. *The son, George, for example:* he married a most delightful *girl* in the summer of 192—.'

And the Doctor?' Wardrop asked. 'What became *of the* Doctor?'

'Perhaps I'l tel you *more on* another occasion,' the scholar replied with a kindly smile. *He* looked out of *the window* of the *Provost's*

Lodge. 'The snow's get ing heavier,' he said.

Present Tense

Ian Potter

Blessed with a knowledge of Block Transfer Computation, a process that can create matter out of sums, albeit very hard

ones, a food machine capable of producing billions of mouthwatering delights at the flick of a dial, store rooms over-

brimming with treasures from a million worlds, and the entirety of creation just outside his time ship's doors, the Doctor

had a real problem choosing Christmas gifts.

You see, when you can get almost anything, getting just the right thing can be a touch tricky, and it's far too easy to be

extravagant without really thinking it through. This year though, judging by the look on his face, Romana had the feeling

that the Doctor thought he'd picked well.

She unravelled the crumpled brown paper parcel warily. K9 had seemed happy enough with his master's gift of an

old biscuit, but she rather suspected that was because the Doctor had reprogrammed him to be very keen on old

biscuits last week. It didn't augur well.

The lumpy package fell open. Inside was a scrunched-up clump of next week's papers. Judging by the headlines

they were going to be busy tomorrow. Trying not to spoil the Boxing Day surprise, Romana gingerly opened up the

screwed-up ball of paper. A pink, pulsing form glittered within. It should, by rights, have been gaudy but it wasn't. It

was utterly gorgeous, and it was humming quietly.

`The Great Crystal Choir Crown of Pseudolonica VII?' Romana sighed. The Doctor nodded.

The single wisest and most beautiful piece of costume jewellery in the universe?'

He smiled eagerly, searching her face for approval. 'Batteries included.' `Thank you,' she said, which didn't seem

entirely enough.

Ìt holds all the spiritual wisdom of the ancient Maargan Heirocrats woven into its ever-evolving lattice, you know,' the

Doctor added, lifting the crown reverentially from next Wednesday's small ads and plonking it on Romana's head at a

jaunty angle.

Ì know,' said Romana wearily, adjusting her hair around it.

Ì discovered there were two whole days in a row, back in the forty-ninth century when it wasn't being worn by a High

Sanctogull Minister,' the Doctor confided, tit of a heavy weekend, apparently. So I nipped in on the Saturday and borrowed

it from its holy resting place. Of course, I'll need to pop it back on the Sunday, one of these millennia, but it's yours 'til

then.'

`You shouldn't have —' Romana began.

Òh, it was no trouble,' explained the Doctor airily, 'just unplugged the old randomiser for a mo, or rather plugged it in,

because someone had left it unplugged, then unplugged it, and... poof!'

He made a gesture which didn't adequately explain what 'poof meant in this context but which seemed to amuse him

greatly, opening his fist up suddenly and then wiggling his fingers like an upturned crab.

`No, you really... shouldn't have,' Romana pressed on. 'People are touchy about borrowing things from holy resting

places, you know. They have that "desecrating" word, remember?'

Òh, people! You don't want to worry about them. They'll not notice. We'll have it back better than new before they

know it's gone. Probably teach it a thing or two on the way too, eh, Kg?'

The little metal d

og waggled his ears noisily, a little affectation he'd developed to show when he was thinking hard.

Everyone else found it deeply embarrassing and contrived, but it's difficult to mention that kind of thing to a friend,

especially when they're doing the kind of maths for you that could fully carpet a Logopolitan cell.

Kg's ears stopped whirring. 'Probability extremely high, master,' he announced. 'Heuristic analysis presents a

ninety-nine point nine nine seven per cent chance of the choir crown both receiving and retaining new data input during

TARDIS stay.'

`There you are, a practical certainty!' the Doctor cried.

`Negative, master,' Kg responded prissily. 'Merely a ninety-nine point nine nine seven per cent chance.'

`Well, nine times out of ten, that's all you need,' the Doctor bellowed back.

`Negative, master,' Kg began, but he was halted by a frosty glance.

The Doctor wiped a little blood and snake venom off a shiny shield nesting in a wall roundel and showed Romana how

she looked in the mirror. Romana essayed a smile at her reflection and the crown itself gave a rather self-satisfied hum.

`Do you like the colour?' said the Doctor. 'You can change it, if you learn to think the wrong things. It advised a thousand

generations of Pseudolonican Sanctogulls this crown, you know? Right through the great Saint Houllier schism.'

Romana tried to sound impressed. The crown giggled appreciatively.

Ànd it knows all the vocal parts in Ruddigore too,' the Doctor added. He didn't add the word 'now', but then he

didn't really need to.

Ì know. It's very nice,' said Romana, taking the crown off and heading to a stasis cupboard. 'I'll put it with the one you

got me last year.'

`Sorry?' said the Doctor dropping the shield on his foot.

`The one from the day later. You'd taught that one some Venusian power ballads and drinking songs.'

`Had I?' he said, hand on mouth.

`Well, it knows them.' There in the cupboard sat an identical crown. The two gave excited squeaks at each other.

Òh. I really shouldn't have, should I?' the Doctor whispered.

`No,' said Romano.

The Doctor was crestfallen. He really had gone to quite a lot of trouble to get the crown, too, what with leading the

Pseudolonican hoi-polloi in an uprising against the Sanctogull elite, devising the last-minute freeze ray that stopped it for

the Holy Guards and then posing as a member of the A.C.A.S. Federation to mediate between the sides. All that, just to

get the High Ministers to let their hair down, have a knees-up and take their hats off that weekend.

Ànd we only really do Christmas for the dog, too,' he said mournfully. He thought for a moment. 'Best not keep the

crowns together then,' he said. 'It's a naughty enough paradox already, without the older one teaching the younger

one the songs it taught itself. Have old Blinovitch spinning in his cradle that would. Just as well that chrono-historical

stress gauge thing broke under the strain.' He hoped no one from Gallifrey was tuning their time screens in on him at

the moment. This was just the kind of tinkering they liked to put you on trial for when it wasn't their idea.

`Still, it's the thought that counts, isn't it?' said Romana trying to buck the Doctor up.

Ì suppose so,' he mumbled. A silence, broken only by an alien coronet softly humming I Know *a* Youth Who *Loves* a

Little Maid to itself, ensued.

`So? What did you get me?' the Doctor asked eventually. 'I know a new autograph book is rather obvious, but in my

line of work I've become rather fond of the obvious. One encounters it so infrequently.'

Òh, I just got you a moment's peace,' said Romano. 'I popped it in your Zero Room. It's a tiny looped time-slice of

that English rose garden you like from 1913:

`You bought me "Peace on Earth"?' the Doctor breathed.

`Yes.'

`Tied up in a bow?'

`Yes.'

He seemed genuinely moved for an instant. 'Oh, thank you, Romana.' `Think nothing of it. Merry Christmas,

Doctor,' she said and gave him a quick and precisely awkward hug.

The Doctor smiled at his two best friends. This was turning into a super Christmas, one that not even that invasion of

Oadby tomorrow o

r th 57ose fusty old fossils back home could spoil.

`Sing the figgy pudding song again, would you, K9?' he asked.

K9 did, and two crystal coronets joined in on backing vocals.

Goodwill Toward Men

J. Shaun Lyon

Winter is a very curious beast. Sometimes it's lush and bitter, cold as ice, still and silent as though a great hand had

reached out and stopped time: snow falls, children play, families gather round the fire. But such is the winter of legends

more than reality.

This time it was a wet winter's evening, nowhere near cold and icy. The rain clouds had opened up only minutes earlier,

had covered the pavement of the asphalt-lined street in a wet but

oily film. Droplets shook from the awnings and rafters

of the buildings on either side of the street. There was a stillness, broken by vague sounds of human life in the distance,

like the neon colours and streetlights every few hundred yards that broke up the night. The moon was at a soft silver

crescent, hung a quarter of the way to the top of the sky, providing a subtle blue-white glow to the street corner as a short,

dark-haired man in a pullover black coat pulled toward him a young woman, who paused momentarily to raise her

handkerchief as she sneezed.

`Gesundheit,' said the man.

`Thank you, Doctor,' replied the young woman, drawing her coat more tightly about her. She looked around at the

dim grey stone of the street corner, the Woolworth's tiles beneath their feet chipped with year after year of foot traffic

while the doors to the once-pristine shopping outlet were nailed shut with wood panels. 'I do believe I'm allergic to this

city. Where's Jamie?'

`Straggling, no doubt.' The Doctor glanced behind them. 'Come along, Jamie, there's a good lad.'

Ì'm here,' came a voice out of the blackness, which soon manifested itself into a burly young man whose patchwork kilt

looked more out of place here than did the rest of this motley crew. 'I canna make heads nor tails of this place, Doctor...

it's like being caught in a nightmare. Again.'

`Nonsense, Jamie,' the Doctor said with his usual matter-of-fact demeanour, as if every statement was plagued

with deadly danger. 'They have cities in your time. Just not quite this large, that's all. And Zoe, you couldn't possibly be

allergic to an entire city, not with your healthy twenty-first-

century genes. It must be just the mist rising from the

pavement. Tickles one's nose; it, too, shall pass.'

`Pavement,' Zoe replied, a bit dejected. 'Black tar, stale old buildings, and please don't tell me we're safe here, Doctor,

because I won't believe you. Dark alleys after nightfall are no place for us on Christmas Eve. I thought you said we were

heading back to London?'

Ìndeed we are, Zoe, indeed we are.' He grinned back at her: that slight,

almost malevolent grin that those who had travelled with him had learned to accept as only a sign of mischief. 'As soon as we

make a slight detour. There's something I would like to show you.'

`Where are we then?' asked Jamie.

los Angeles, late twentieth-century Earth. And there's no need to fear; we're perfectly safe.'

Àye.' Jamie nodded. 'I was afraid you'd say that.'

`Jamie, Christmas can be a warm, wet evening; so too can a dark alley cover the truth.'

Zoe and Jamie said nothing; they just looked at him cross-eyed.

Àll right, enough of the mixed metaphors for one evening. Come along, Zoe, Jamie, we have business to attend.' He

offered the girl his arm, which she took, and together, the three walked off into the night.

Zoe Heriot was a girl used to getting her own way. She hadn't been particularly worldly growing up, but she never had any

great needs or wants that weren't taken care of by her family and their position, and by the era in which she lived:

creature comforts large and small, paid for by symbiosis with technology and an enlightened age of civilisation. But

since she'd joined company with the Doctor, Zoe had noticed the rather spartan lifestyle he led, deep within the confines

of his TARDIS. He seemed to share her good fortune, never needing anything that the TARDIS could not provide for

him, but he didn't use the ship's abilities to be thus provided for. A bit of colour here, some mathematical games

consoles there... Something to make the place a bit more homey. That's what she sometimes requested in passing, but he

never took any notice.

But though it was stark and rather too bright, the TARDIS was immaculately clean.

A sharp contrast to the squalor she was now led into.

This also was a brightly lit, large room, but it stank of overcooked cabbage. At first glance it appeared to be some sort

of gymnasium; there was a basketball hoop attached to the cracking paint and bare wood girders on the far wall, and

below it, five teenagers bounced around a brown, well-worn ball. They were wearing slightly tattered clothing, be they Los

Angeles Lakers basketball jerseys or sweatshirts where the paint had flaked and come off. Zoe recalled encyclopedia entries

for all these things and smiled at her recall. In the space between herself and the far wall were rows of low cots with worn

bedding, and for each there was a ragged-looking man or woman. The rest of the people inside were lined against the

wall to her right, on which was a counter full of bowls and plates, and behind which were a handful of people dressed in

serving gowns, doing their best to keep up.

`What is this place?' she asked.

`The Los Angeles Midnight Mission,' the Doctor replied. 'A shelter for those

who do not have a home. A place for the weary to rest with a roof over their heads and get a hot meal.' He nodded toward

the kitchen. 'And over there, volunteers, giving up their evenings to tend to the less fortunate.'

`Homeless people?' Zoe asked. 'I thought you said this was the late twentieth century?'

Ìndeed I did,' he began, but stopped as the trio were approached by a burly blond man with a moustache and goatee. His

head rose high above theirs, and as he approached, he looked downward toward them.

Jamie took an instinctive step backwards.

`What can I do for you?' asked the man.

The Doctor smiled at him. 'Hello. I'm the Doctor, this is Jamie —' he pointed at one friend, then the other, and this is

Zoe. And you are?'

There was a certain amount of mistrust in the man's voice. 'Carl. The handyman. What do you want?'

The Doctor stepped forward to his side, as if to go around him, looking around the large chamber quizzically. 'Oh,

we're here... we're here to help, you see.' He looked back at Carl. 'I'm sure you could use a few extra hands tonight, isn't

that so?'

Carl nodded. The gruff demeanour vanished, and there was a vague hint of a smile on his otherwise brutish mouth.

`Go through there,' he said, pointing to a door to their left. 'Donna will fix you up.'

`Thank you,' the Doctor replied, 'you're very kind.'

Carl nodded and went on his way.

`What was that all about?' asked Zoe when the man was no longer in earshot.

The Doctor paused momentarily. 'There are dark forces at work here.' `Monsters?' asked Jamie, stepping forward

toward the two.

`Hunger. And loneliness. You'll find they have a tremendous capacity to turn even the most charitable heart to stone.

Come, come...' And he led them toward the kitchen.

Jamie turned to Zoe. 'Why'd he bring us here, Zoe?' He looked around. 'I don't think I like this place very much.'

`Neither do I, Jamie,' she replied, shaking her head as she watched the Doctor wander off. 'Neither do I.'

It was a kitchen... but not much of one. It wasn't particularly dirty or messy, it was just very inadequately stocked and

supplied, with few cooking pots and utensils, and very little in the way of versatility. The Doctor almost tripped over a

small makeshift card-table propped up as a serving area. Its plastic legs were slightly bent with the weight; on top of it was a

small pot, empty except for a layer of residue from something that had obviously been cooking too long, and a ladle. The

Doctor picked up the ladle, examined the timeless air of leftover porridge and placed it back in the pot, upturning his nose

ever so slightly.

`Why are we here, Doctor?' asked Zoe. 'It's Christmas Eve.'

Ànd life should stop just because the world takes a holiday? The human race didn't simply wake up one day and

decide to end hunger and poverty, my dear. It took centuries of hard work and determination. And then they lost and found

the will to do it, many times. As if it weren't the most important thing they could do. These battles were mostly fought by

people who worked on a volunteer basis, against the needs of their own self-preservation.'

170

Zoe looked into the dirty pot. 'Couldn't they pay them?'

Tay 'em?' asked a female voice from the doorway. 'With what? Money don't grow on trees.'

'I'm well aware of that,' Zoe replied, a touch more hotly than she would have liked.

The woman appeared to be around fifty. It was hard to say with the additional years of wear that wrinkled her face

as much as it had dirtied her sports jacket. Her battered baseball cap hid a mound of brownish-red hair, and she

scratched her head through the side of the cap. In another lifetime, she could almost be considered aristocratic, the way

she held her head high, even though in these dark places, touched with soot and the pain of years of starvation, she'd have

been an aristocrat that had lost her way. She certainly had presence, though.

Ì just thought that whoever it was that would open this establishment would pay to have proper help in the

kitchens,' Zoe continued.

The woman sidled up to Zoe, and the girl summoned backbone enough to stay where she was. She glanced toward the

Doctor, who merely nodded in her direction. Jamie just stood by, watching. 'Donations keep this place running, girl. The

kindness of people's hearts. That's all that stands between them 'n the outside world.' A brief pause. 'You from

England?'

Not especially,' Zoe began, but the Doctor took the opportunity to step forward and cut her off.

`Yes, as a matter of fact, we are,' the Doctor said quickly. He grinned, the usual smile that crossed a mischievous boy

with a circus clown. 'We are... tourists.'

`This late? Well, I guess it doesn't matter none. You English people know all about this kinda stuff, right? My Daddy was

there, y'see, back during the war.' She looked at Zoe. 'He always said he was just like you, before he went... before he

saw babies dyin', cities bombed to rubble.' The woman paused again. 'Poor Daddy. Always had the bad luck to end up

in places they were about to blow apart to kingdom come!' She chuckled. Tut he always did tell me that it doesn't take

much to change a person's mind...'

`You must be Donna,' the Doctor said. 'Carl pointed us in your direction. I gather you work here?'

Ì help out when I'm not takin' advantage of the facilities.'

Ùm, yes. Might I ask how long you've been...' His voice trailed off.

`Homeless,' she replied. 'Ain't a dirty word; as they say, it's not me, it's my state of mind.'

`Homeless, then. No fixed abode.'

Zoe realised that the Doctor had put on the tone of voice he reserved for diplomats and friendly heads of state. It

conveyed respect, but underneath that, a kind ofmocking warmth, a shared joke. This was a formidable woman, and she

wasn't used to extraordinary displays of human kindness.

Ì ain't. Not anymore, anyway. I was, but now I've got a room over in the old Mallory Hotel, in the garment district.

Panhandling's been pretty good to me. This week, at least.' She leaned to mutter in the Doctor's ear, though they could

all hear her words clearly. 'You wouldn't happen to have some

spare change?'

`Yes, of course.' The Doctor fumbled in his waistcoat pocket. He pulled out a button, then a thimble, and finally some

silver-coloured coins. He looked at the coins for a moment, then placed them into Donna's hand. Then something

caught his eye and he reached back again. 'Sorry,' he said, grabbing one of the coins in her hand, 'that's not an...

American coin.' He shot a warning glance at Zoe.

`Thanks. You'll fit in just fine here tonight, I'm sure.'

`Yes, of course. We're anxious to get started. Aren't we?' He turned around toward his companions.

Zoe was startled. 'Yes... yes, we are. Aren't we, Jamie?'

`What?' Jamie said with a slight yelp, as he raised his head and promptly bashed it into a shelf above him.

The Doctor turned back toward Donna. 'Quite.'

`You'd think,' said Zoe after Donna had left, 'that a powerful country such as the United States of America, with such

advancements as microtechnology and atomic fission, would have learned to control their social problems. Or at least

provide a decent welfare system.'

`They have a welfare system,' the Doctor responded, 'but at this point in American history, it had no sense of purpose or

focus. The object of a welfare system is to lend a helping hand, until one gets back on one's feet. This is a refuge, but it's

also a prison, shutting its people away from sight. Like any swath of fabric, there are spaces between the threads.'

`Back home,' Jamie added, 'we had some rogues, Doctor. Beggars and thieves, they were. We didna pay them

attention.'

The Doctor shook his head. 'No, no, Jamie, these people are not thieves. Well... sometimes, perhaps even often, but not

in principle. But attention is still not paid. Even the most powerful nation in the world, ahead of its time in its economy

and its military, cannot afford to feed its most desperate and hungry.'

`Well, I'm appalled,' said Zoe.

The sound of raised voices startled them.

Jamie was out of the door before the Doctor could say anything.

Inside the pantry were three people. One was the handyman, Carl. The other two were strangers. One was an adult: tall,

black, with a moustache and short-cropped hair. The other could not have been more than eight years of age. He was frozen

in his tracks, looking at Carl and shaking slightly. The older man, very likely his father, was holding a knife on the

handyman.

`Just gimme the knife,' Carl was saying. 'You don't wanna hurt nobody.'

The man with the knife was shaking too, the Doctor noticed, as he stepped around Jamie very quietly, trying not to

attract any attention. 'No... no, I don't, so's long as you keep back, there ain't bein' no trouble.'

`Daddy, I'm scared,' said the little boy.

Without looking at him, the father spoke to his son, all the while his gaze focused on Carl, who was holding his hands

up slightly. 'Just get the supplies I told ya and we'll get outta here. Gonna go celebrate Christmas tonight, we are.'

Èxcuse me,' said the Doctor.

They turned, the father turning his arm to display the rather large kitchen knife he was holding. The little boy took a

step backward into the cupboard he was peering out from, a bag in his hand full of whatever it was he'd been collecting.

Ìs there something I can do to help bring this conversation to a more cheery end?'

`You... you can stand there and shut up,' said the father.

`That'll be the day,' whispered Jamie.

`Now, I'm sure whatever issue you might have, it can be solved without bringing violence into the equation. What is

it you are looking for?' Òbviously he's trying to rob us,' Carl said.

Now, now, Carl, I'm sure he's only looking after his... that's your son, I take it?'

The father, his brow beaded with sweat, his extended arm holding the knife shaking slightly, managed a faint hint of a

smile. 'That's Joe.'

`Joe, yes. He looks to be a fine lad. Hello, Joe,' said the Doctor, nodding toward the boy. To everyone's surprised Joe

waved back to him.

The Doctor turned his attention back to the father. 'I think we could have a jolly nice chat about what it is that would

drive you to pull a knife on such a terribly useful person as Carl here.'

`You think I want to do this? I'm... I'm just tryin' to provide for my boy. He ain't ever had a good Christmas, always

on the streets, always wonderin' where his next meal's gonna come from.'

Ànd yet you end up trying to burgle the only place in town that could provide some help. These are good people,

Mr...?'

`Charlie.'

`Charlie, Carl.' The Doctor affected introductions. 'Carl, this is Charlie. He's going to put the knife down, and we'll

sit down and talk. And there won't be any police involved and no one will go to gaol. Is that clear?'

Carl looked stunned at him for a moment. 'Urn... yeah, sure. We don't want no trouble on Christmas Eve.'

`There,' said the Doctor, who reached out for Charlie's hand. 'Give me the knife.'

Charlie glanced to his side, looking at little Joe, who took a step back into the cupboard. Then he turned back to the

Doctor, unable to stop the shaking in his hand. He handed him the knife. Then he closed his eyes in relief for a few

moments, and suddenly the shaking stopped.

`There's a good chap,' said the Doctor, who reached forward and placed his hand on the man's shoulder. Charlie started

to cry and Joe ran to him.

`Jamie, Zoe,' said the Doctor, 'can you go into the dining area and fetch Donna for me? We need to get this man some

coffee and something for the boy.'

1734

Much later in the evening, as the lines had started to form in the dining area, the Doctor, Jamie and Zoe were taking a

momentary break from what had been their work of the evening: cleaning and preparing.

Jamie had complained that it was a scullion's work, but judging from the vigour with which he'd set about scrubbing, he

wasn't a stranger to such tasks himself.

Zoe was, however. She'd asked if there wasn't something of an organisational nature she could apply herself to.

The Doctor had shaken his head.

Charlie and Joe were now in the line, waiting for the cooks behind the counter to start serving.

The Doctor sat silently, drinking tea during the break.

Zoe found herself studying the people who'd arrived here for food. So many children, not just Joe. Boys and girls,

adolescents, of varying colours and backgrounds.

Jamie saw where she was looking and tilted his head sideways just a notch with incredulity. Now, I dinnae understand

that at all. Why are there young children here? Surely the Laird would make sure that -'

`-. they cannot be homeless as well, just like their fathers?' The Doctor shook his head. 'Desperate times, Jamie.

Entire families sent to the streets, to beg for coins and food and shelter, in a world that turned its back on them.'

Zoe watched from afar as Charlie struck up a moment's conversation with Donna. Joe clutched his arms tightly

around his own shoulders, still cold.

Ànd so these people have nothing,' she said.

`Nothing is still something,' the Doctor replied. He nodded toward the

conversation happening apart from them, in the kitchen line. 'Don't underestimate the human spirit.'

Zoe watched as Donna took off her tattered coat, then wrapped it around the shoulders of the young boy.

`They still care for each other, don't they?'

'Oh, yes, Zoe. They do. Did you think that we were in a world without hope?' There was something about the way he said it,

as if he was trying to provoke something in her.

Christmas, in sharp relief. The spirit of giving. The kindness of strangers. Zoe suddenly understood. 'This is about me,

isn't it? What I said to you yesterday?'

'In the TARDIS, yes.'

The TARDIS had just left a miserable, squalid little colony in the Acteon Galaxy, ruled by nobody, with no law except

force, left desolate and forgotten by the greater powers around it. They had been separated, locked up and finally

escaped back to the ship. Zoe and the Doctor had been discussing where to head next. Christmas Eve in London had

seemed a fine idea then: a relief, a holiday.

Ìt's not as if they were trying to make anything better on that planet, was it, D

o

c

t

o

r

?

'

'Did it seem to you as if they had a choice?'

'Of course they did. Every single one of them.'

'When they were tied to what had happened all around them, trodden down by it, tied up in knots by history?'

'Well, if I were living there,' she had replied, 'things would be different. I would make an effort, change everything.'

'And that, my dear,' the Doctor finished, 'is why I brought you

here. So you could. Off you go.'

'What do you mean?'

The smile never left the Doctor's face, but there was a gentle edge to his voice. 'Change this world. Go on.'

'But —'

'After all, you have many more resources at hand than those people in the queues. You start at a considerable

advantage.'

'Are you saying it's impossible?'

'Not at all.'

'Well, it must be very difficult!'

The Doctor looked like he'd just played a particularly clever practical joke. 'Well,' he said. 'That was easier than I

thought.'

Zoe found herself angry and guilty at the same time. She folded her arms. 'That was a trick,' she said.

`Yes,' he said. 'Do forgive me.'

Òh, do shut up,' 17

Zo 5e sighed. 'That's what I should be saying to you.'

And so the Doctor, Jamie and Zoe stayed through the night. Zoe read stories to the girls in the mission, who snapped to

attention at the fairy tales, tales of magic, of wonder... of places far beyond the confines of their lives.

Jamie ended up regaling the youngsters with stories of how he'd played against some of the best in his clan, in

Scotland, in the world!

The little boy named Joe seemed to have the best time of all, laughing where there had been no laughter before.

The Doctor had volunteered behind the kitchen counter, serving the holiday meal: turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes,

corn-on-the-cob, fresh baked bread and pumpkin pie, all prepared and donated by those who themselves enjoyed a

proper Christmas, yet in honour of those that could not.

Zoe thought he looked good in a chef's hat. But somehow, he'd gotten himself covered in flour.

When most of the children were safely tucked into their makeshift cots, the Doctor and Zoe helped the other volunteers

clean the pots and pans and put them away neatly in the cabinets. Jamie continued to spend time with some of the boys,

who were too restless to sleep... but, of course, were getting there slowly.

Joe needed the most attention, for what he'd been through that day.

After their work was done, they sang Christmas carols with the scraggly group of adults that was still awake.

Zoe was quite surprised at how many songs the Doctor was familiar with: second and third verses of popular carols that

she didn't know existed. Jamie sometimes found these utterly familiar, and had a repertoire of Christmas tunes himself,

as befitted a piper. But with the more modern carols he wouldn't admit he was lost, and hummed along until he picked

up the tune.

At the end, Zoe noticed the old woman, Donna, sweeping the floor in the main foyer.

Àh, young lady, yer still around,' she said. 'Did you get some food?' She put the brush down. 'Just finishing up on my

way out.'

Àre you going to be able to get...?'

`Home. The hotel. Yeah. I'll be fine. The world isn't as scary a place as you think.'

`You should see some of the things I've seen.'

Donna laughed.

Ì didn't mean—!'

`Whatever. There's muggers and rapists and all sorts of who-knows-what,

but when it comes right down to it, there's just people. Without 'em, it's just empty space, isn't it?'

Zoe wondered for a moment if she could, and then decided it was all she could do. She gently kissed Donna on the

forehead.

The Doctor, Jamie and Zoe walked back to the TARDIS in the early morning rain.

`That was a good Christmas Eve,' said Zoe.

Òne of the best I've had,' said Jamie. Tut it's been the only Christmas Eve I've been to in donkey's years, and the way

you two go on about them, I'm thinking I'm missing something.'

`Well,' murmured the Doctor, 'since Christmas began with a homeless family, with ugliness and deprivation, and is

a celebration of hope in the middle of all that, I don't see why we can't have both. Let's be on our way to Christmas Eve in

London.'

Aww, we won't get there, not twice in a row!'

`Do we deserve it?' Zoe looked awkwardly at the ground as they reached the TARDIS. 'We didn't change anything.'

The Doctor put his finger on her nose. 'An old friend once told me, if I could change one mind, and she in turn could

change another... well, that would be a

g

o

o

d

s

t

a

r

t

.

'

Zoe found that she was smiling. 'Merry Christmas, Doctor.'

Ànd a Merry Christmas to you, my dear Zoe.'

And with that he hurried them all inside, closed the door, and made his small home fade away into the rain.

176

It's a Lovely Day Tomorrow

177

Martin Day

Ì did protest, but my superiors were insistent. We stay in Charnage House, or we sleep under the stars.'

Volunteer Richard Charlesworth had stepped into the old dormitory to find Captain Hawkins and Corporal Gaunt deep

in conversation, with their backs to the doorway. Now he stood nervously listening to the older men, wondering if

he shouldn't announce his presence with a cough or a more forceful 'Sir?'

`Still,' continued Captain Hawkins, 'we've all got to make do and mend.' Corporal Gaunt seemed not inclined to share

Hawkins's optimism. 'I think we'd be better off in the open air,' he muttered.

`What's that, Corporal?' Hawkins asked sharply.

The men, sir,' said Gaunt, more loudly. 'They don't like this place.'

Captain Hawkins grunted, looking around him. Charlesworth followed his gaze. Although the white plaster of the walls

was being eaten away by mould, overhead the roof was largely intact, with only occasional slices of star-encrusted cloud

visible through the thick oak rafters.

`This room will have to do,' said Hawkins. 'I inspected the other rooms myself, and they weren't up to scratch.'

Ìt's not the rooms,' said Corporal Gaunt. 'It's this whole damnable building!'

Òld wives' tales of ghosties and ghoulies?' Hawkins snorted. 'I expected more of a veteran of Ypres.'

It took Charlesworth a moment to recognise Hawkins's pronunciation of the Belgian town; Gaunt had only ever called

the place 'Wipers'.

`Have you seen anything before, or since, more brutal, more macabre, than that?' continued Hawkins.

Gaunt shook his head. 'I don't doubt the evil that men can do,' he said. 'But I've lived in this area for many years. This

old workhouse... it's infamous.'

Hawkins was about to reply but Charlesworth could observe in silence no longer. He cleared his throat nervously.

Captain Hawkins turned on the spot.

`We've set up a rota for the patrols, sir,' announced Charlesworth, saluting. `Good, good,' said Hawkins. 'It's been quite a

day! Worth giving up a cosy Christmas in front of the fire for, no?'

Charlesworth paused, wondering what to say. 'It's taken my mind off

things,' he said eventually, fiddling with the gun that he held at his side. 'Sir.'

`That South Somerset lot,' said Hawkins triumphantly. 'I'd heard they were

a rabble, and by heavens we proved it today!' He indicated Charlesworth's shotgun with his polished regimental

swagger stick. 'Is this your own weapon?' he queried.

Charlesworth raised the gun uncertainly. It was a crude affair, its twin barrels clumsily sawn off. 'It was all that Dad

could find. He said if I was so keen to join the Home Guard, I should bring my own weapon.'

`Your father was a poacher in his youth.' Corporal Gaunt's colourless face cracked into a smile. 'What he hoped to catch

with that particular weapon is beyond me. Dorset is not noted for its big game '

`Get the thing cleaned,' ordered Hawkins. 'A gun in that state is more of a menace to you than the enemy.'

`Sir.' Charlesworth saluted clumsily, then marched quickly from the room.

He came down the great staircase to find the other volunteers and a couple of sergeants in the hallway. Some were

smoking, shielding their cigarettes against the biting winds that seemed to rip through every fissure in the stonework.

`Dicky, my boy!' called Patterson, a local farmer who knew

Charlesworth's father. 'Care to join us?'

Charlesworth shook his head. 'Thanks, but no.'

`Suit yourself,' said Patterson, though he continued, in a conspiratorial whisper. 'Don't worry about the NCOs,' he

said. 'They've found themselves a little office on the ground floor. They won't hear a thing. We're going to see in

Christmas with a wee dram of Scotch.'

Ì just want to get my head down,' insisted Charlesworth. And with an apologetic shrug of the shoulders he turned

away.

The men broke into an impromptu performance of Silent Night at about midnight. It woke Dicky Charlesworth. He had

only just dropped off t 17

o 8

179sleep: though the woollen blankets seemed clean enough he had been haunted by the sensation of

things crawling through the fibres and dropping onto his skin. His irritation subsided as the guttural voices of the

amateur and infirm soldiers were transformed into something sad and fragile: faltering, heavenward-pointing

beauty, in the dark heart of a haunted house in wartime.

As the notes faded away, devoured by the shadows and ghosts of the dust-filled corridors, Charlesworth felt his heart

momentarily warmed, but the song seemed to have the opposite effect on the men. They became sullen and maudlin. Talk

turned to their families and the poor sods they knew who'd never be reunited with their loved ones. Some cheerful soul

tried to turn the subject around to recent victories, but the forced optimism sat heavy in Charlesworth's stomach.

How much longer could little England hold out against the unstoppable might of the Nazi war machine? The air battle

over Britain in the summer had seemed to say they were on a knife edge.

When one of the men alluded to the raids over Coventry, Charlesworth crept further into his bedding. He didn't want to

hear about sacrifice and death and war any more; he just wanted the whole bloody thing to be over.

Eventually the grumbling conversation gave way to open and honest snoring.

Much later, when he was sure everyone else was asleep, Charlesworth slipped from his woollen sleeping bag. He was

down to patrol the grounds in less than an hour anyway. Perhaps a walk would clear his head.

Charlesworth stepped through the dark, wood-panelled corridor, his eyes distracted by the iridescent shapes thrown by

the torchlight. He'd draped a handkerchief over his torch to minimise the light, having been on the wrong side of enough

ARP wardens in the past.

He glanced behind, and saw a flickering lamp further down the corridor. Either it was one of the soldiers looking for

somewhere to relieve himself, or it was Corporal Gaunt on the prowl.

Charlesworth was about to edge down the stairway when an inexplicable chill gripped him. He felt the hairs on the

back of his rise, and he shivered involuntarily.

He found himself looking around in utter panic, wondering if someone had crept up on him. But there was no one there.

Then, from one of the rooms off the main corridor, he heard what seemed to be an anguished machine, or the sound

of souls in torment. The noise swelled and fell back on itself like

waves.

Charlesworth dropped to the floor in alarm. His forehead was damp with sweat, but shivers were pulsing up and down

his spine like electric shocks. As the temperature plummeted there was a momentary flash of pale blue light visible under

one of the doors; then there was a solid, finite thump, and the house became quiet once more.

Charlesworth swallowed down the sickly taste of fear, resisting the subconscious urge to flee. He tried to reason

with himself: ghosts are insubstantial spirit creatures. They can't hurt you. It's Boche soldiers with guns and the ability

to strip away your earthly life that you have to worry about.

Breathing heavily, he rose to his full height and stepped nervously towards the door. He raised his hands, and only then

did he remember that he was still carrying the snub-nosed gun.

Whatever was behind the door — a ghost, the prelude to a German invasion, or even one of the Somerset lads

larking about — Volunteer Richard Charlesworth was determined to be ready for them.

Just as he placed a palm slick with sweat on the rusted handle he heard a male voice from within. His resolve

crumbled in an instant.

He turned, shouting, and ran for the safety of the others.

*** * ***

Captain Hawkins quickly assumed control. He ordered that, behind the blackout curtains, every light in Charnage

House be switched on. Word was sent to the patrols outside the house, and men were detailed to search each room.

Charlesworth had been questioned swiftly, Hawkins and Gaunt giving no sign of whether or not they believed him.

However, Hawkins said time was of the essence, and, within minutes of his supernatural encounter, Charlesworth found

himself searching the remains of the ornamental garden with Patterson.

Patterson seemed irritated, as if this whole song-and-dance was in retaliation for the men's earlier singing and

drinking. 'I was having the most wonderful dream. A romantic meal with Jane Russell! Soft lighting, chicken and

vegetables, with spotted dick to follow.' He sighed. 'Why'd you have to go and spoil it, old boy?'

Charlesworth was about to defend himself when a man stepped from the shadows. 'Hello,' he said brightly. 'I was

wondering if you could help me?'

-18o

Without thinking Charlesworth and Patterson raised their weapons, though both took a step backwards. The

man carried on talking. Either he hadn't seen the guns or was used to staring down the barrels of loaded weapons.

`My friend is lost in the grounds. We became separated in the darkness. Perhaps you'd be good enough to help me find

her?'

The man smiled broadly, flashing his ivory-white teeth. It was only then that Charlesworth noticed his wild hair, his trailing

scarf and nondescript hat. In the darkness he looked like a cross between Harpo Marx and Lon Chaney.

`Who are you?' said Patterson, finally finding his voice.

À traveller,' said the man in a well-educated voice as rich as chocolate sauce. 'I'm called the Doctor, and my friend — if

she's here — is called Leela.' Suddenly his face became serious. Ìf you find her, be careful. Very careful. She will be unlike

anyone you have ever met.'

Ìs that a threat?' asked Patterson.

The strange man laughed. 'How could it be? You have all the guns,' he observed.

`You will accompany us back to the house,' said Patterson.

`What a good idea! If there are more of you, perhaps you could help me find my friend.'

Patterson, emboldened by the man's passivity, jabbed his rifle towards him. `Come on,' he snapped.

As they turned for the house Charlesworth's torch failed. He stumbled forwards in the sudden darkness, cursing his

misfortune.

The stranger grasped Charlesworth as he fell, hauling him back to his feet. `Let me have a look at that,' the man said.

Even Patterson momentarily ceded to the stranger's innate authority, shining his own dimmed lamp down towards

the hunched figures.

The stranger pulled open Charlesworth's torch, then took a small silver wand from his pocket. There was a shrill

noise, a brief flash of light, and Charlesworth's torch blazed into life, blinding the young soldier.

`There you are,' said the man, grinning broadly. 'A loose connection.'

`Thank you,' mumbled Charlesworth, ignoring Patterson's scornful look. `How did you mend it so quickly?'

`That doesn't matter. The important thing is that your torch is working. Without a light to illuminate our paths, who

knows where we might have ended up?'

An image from a recent comic strip suddenly flashed through Charlesworth's mind: a secret agent with a

host of strange gizmos in his jacket and a bizarre taste in clothing. 'Are you working undercover?' he suddenly

blurted out. 'Are you here on a mission?'

`Quiet, lad,' breathed Patterson.

But Charlesworth was breathless with excitement. The depression he had felt earlier was suddenly replaced with an

impossible optimism, a desperate desire to dream that everything would work out for the best. 'It's hard for us, not

really knowing what's going on. The newsreel only tells you about the good things, but you hear such awful stories when

you're chatting. It does get me down so.'

`Dicky,' warned Patterson in a low growl.

`My gran died in Coventry,' said Charlesworth, unaccountably on the verge of tears. 'She'd never hurt anyone. I

wonder if it's all worth it —'

`That's enough!' snapped Patterson. let's get back to Captain Hawkins.'

As they returned to Charnage House the prisoner said nothing in response to Charlesworth's desperate plea for

information. Soon Charlesworth and the man found themselves in Hawkins's room, a ground-floor office where the

wallpaper was peeling off in strips.

For almost half an hour Charlesworth watched as Hawkins questioned the strange man who called himself the Doctor.

Hawkins raised an occasional eyebrow, and once suppressed a snort of derision, but largely remained impassive.

Ìt's Christmas Eve,' said Hawkins. 'What business do you have here?'

Òh, I have business everywhere,' said the stranger airily. 'And my mode of transport... it's not entirely predictable when

it comes to the time of my arrival.'

`So it would seem. You have found yourself in the middle of an exercise involving some nine hundred men from three

counties. At points we will be using live ammunition. This is no

place for civilians.'

'I'll bear that in mind, Captain.'

1181

82

Ìt is, however, a place where I might expect German spies to be at work. Spies, or fifth columnists.'

The man affected stiff outrage. 'Come now, Captain! Do I look like a spy to you? Well, yes, probably, probably I do!

Which means I'm very possibly not one, don't you think, Captain? Anyone?'

Hawkins glanced at the strangely dressed man, as if to gaze too long on the man's nonconformist clothing would be to

risk moral dissolution. 'I'm not sure what you look like,' he said. 'You speak perfect English, you seem aware of our

customs, you even implied that you know why we're here...'

Àn educated guess?' said the man. 'You know, I was hoping for a cup of tea. I realise it is rather late...'

`Volunteer Charlesworth?' interrupted Hawkins. 'Did you see the lady that the prisoner refers to?'

Charlesworth shook his head. 'He was on his own, sir.'

Corporal Gaunt appeared in the doorway. 'Sir? The men have completed a

thorough inspection of the house and grounds. They found nothing.' Àre you sure?' queried the stranger. `Leela

can't have gone far.' 'Leela?' queried Hawkins. 'Unusual name A foreigner?'

`My friend is a very unusual person,' said the Doctor. 'And, you know, you're right, she does come from another place,

another culture. Are you sure you haven't seen her?'

Hawkins coughed, doubtless remembering the Doctor's description of his `companion'. 'I think my men would

remember seeing a... half-naked w

o

m

a

n

.

'

`There was one thing,' offered Gaunt nervously. 'Some joker's moved a police box into one of the upper rooms. I'd

swear it wasn't there earlier.'

`How the blazes did they manage that?' exclaimed Hawkins. 'Those things weigh a ton!'

Àh,' said the Doctor grandly. 'Mine, I'm afraid. Once I'm reunited with my friend —'

Charlesworth missed the conclusion to the Doctor's sentence. Just at that moment a cold point of iron was pressed

against his throat and his arms were twisted behind his back. His shotgun clattered to the floor.

Ìf you move,' came a hissed voice at his ear, 'I will cut open your throat.'

It took Charlesworth a few moments to realise that he'd been caught napping by a woman. A woman, barely dressed

in a leather loincloth, with a murderous glint in her eyes and a broad, thick knife in her hand.

Àh, there you are, Leela!' said the strange man, beaming and apparently unconcerned at Charlesworth's plight.

Ì am sorry we became separated,' said the woman. 'I became

impatient. It was... wrong of me.'

Òh, that's all right,' said the man. 'A little impetuous optimism in the young... that's no bad thing, is it, Captain

Hawkins?'

Hawkins spluttered something under his breath but, for the moment, said nothing. His hand was already on the flap of

his holster.

`Put away the knife, Leela,' said the stranger, turning to address the savage. Ì'm sure Captain Hawkins will let us

return to the TARDIS.'

Hawkins remained impassive. 'Let the boy go.'

Àllow us to return to our vessel,' said the woman. 'You heard the Doctor! We do not belong here.' She flexed her

fingers against the handle of the knife. 'I do not wish to kill this boy.'

Hawkins exchanged whispered comments with Gaunt, then turned to the stranger. 'Very well,' he said.

A line of soldiers, with the strangely dressed man and woman at its heart, made their way towards the upper room that

Gaunt said contained the police box.

With the primitive woman walking behind him, still holding a knife to his throat, Charlesworth wasn't sure if he was

frightened of dying or frightened of surviving and becoming a laughing stock. He still couldn't work out how the woman

had been able to creep up behind him; she must move like a hunting cat on padded claws.

`Well, gentlemen, it's been a pleasure,' said the man as they reached the room. 'I'm sorry we weren't able to sample

your tea — there's 184

nothing quite like army tea in an urn the size of a small market town, is there? — but I fear we've

taken up more than enough of your time. Please, do return to your slumbers, gentlemen... and happy dreams!'

The savage released her grip on Charlesworth and, with almost impossible speed, both man and woman disappeared

inside the room, the door slamming shut behind them.

`Right,' said Hawkins, turning to Gaunt once he was sure that Charlesworth was unharmed. 'There's no other door to

this room, is there?' 183

Gaunt shook his head. 'Barring the drainpipes, there's one way in, and one way out.'

`Take some men round the back of the house,' ordered Hawkins. 'Watch the windows. If either of them try to escape, fire a

warning shot.'

`Sir,' said Gaunt. He saluted, then limped back down the stairs. `Now let's see what they...'

Hawkins's words trailed away. An awful groaning noise came from within the room. It was the same sound that

Charlesworth had heard earlier. The sound increased in tempo, then faded to angels' whispers.

Hawkins pulled his pistol from its holster and, in one swift movement, kicked open the door.

The room beyond was deserted. There was no sign of the two travellers, or the police box that Gaunt said had been

there only moments previously. Charlesworth and Hawkins ran to the window, locked solid by age. A couple of tiny

panes were missing, but they'd barely allow a butterfly safe passage out of the room.

And, beneath them, stood Gaunt and a couple of men, looking eagerly upwards as if expecting to see the bohemian or the

savage shinning down the drainpipes.

`Stone the crows,' breathed Hawkins.

À dashed queer night, Dicky,' said Patterson, settling down to sleep. 'Who'd have thought it, eh? Ghosts that can talk,

then disappear in the blink of an eye!'

`They weren't ghosts,' said Charlesworth.

Patterson guffawed loudly. 'I forgot, you got quite close to the lady, didn't you?'

One of the other men made some ribald comment and there was much sniggering from the corners of the dormitory.

`Quite a looker,' continued Patterson. 'And you know what they say about these foreign women...'

`You go back to your dreams ofJane Russell,' said Charlesworth, aware that his face was reddening in

embarrassment. 'My life was in danger. I was thinking about other things!'

Ì'm sure you were,' said Patterson, with a lascivious wink. 'I'm sure you were.' He set about pounding some softness

into his pillow. 'Anyhow, you s e e m a b i t m o r e c h e e r f u l f o r t h e e x p e r i e n c e . '

Charlesworth nodded. 'Of course I am. Isn't it obvious who they were?' Patterson shook his head.

`Secret agents!' said Charlesworth. 'Secret agents with the best equipment the British Empire can produce. That chap

was no German! I've never met anyone so English, going on about tea! And did you see that silver wand he had? And

that disappearing trick...'

`So?'

`With kit like that... Well, we're going to win this blasted war, aren't we?' `Perhaps.'

`Course we are!' said Charlesworth. 'They've got to keep it all hush-hush, but, you mark my words... Just a few more

months...' Charlesworth snuggled down into his bedding, which now felt like silk and cotton. 'By the middle of 1941 this

will all be over.'

Ì hope you're right,' said Patterson with a sigh. 'Night. Sleep tight.' `Night,' said Charlesworth with a grin.

'Happy Christmas.'

All Our Christmases

Steve Lyons

It was like a scene out of a story book.

A dark evening. A secluded lodge in the shadow of a venerable tree. A heavy snowfall, blanketing the sky until it seemed

there was nothing but this, nowhere else in the world.

Inside: wood panelling. A fire in the hearth, threatening to smother the room with its heat. A pair of black leather

armchairs, deep and welcoming. Two half-filled glasses. And two men: strangers, brought together by fate.

Of course, it was Christmas Eve.

One of the strangers was called Richard. He considered himself a young man still, and sometimes it scared him that he

was in his forties now. His dark hair was receding from his brow, greying at the temples. He blamed this on the grind of

a job that he hated; it was meant as a joke, but there was some truth behind it.

The older man didn't offer a name. He wore an old-fashioned frock coat, and kept his hands clasped over the handle

of a stout walking stick. His hair was grey and sparse, scraped

back from his brow. His eyes were the most intense blue,

regarding his companion with unblinking curiosity, and the crinkles around them gave him a kind but knowing

expression. When he heard that Richard worked in publishing, he said he'd been a writer himself. Or had he only

dreamed of writing? It was hard to be sure.

They began with the weather, that grand old English stand-by. The old man thought the snow was magical, but Richard

had always hated it for making the ground treacherous and turning the road to his local shops into a target range for

adolescents. He was glad to be indoors.

They established that both were visiting this resort for the first time, and agreed what a wonderful place it was to

unwind, to escape the stress of this most difficult of seasons.

And, as the night drew in, they felt their way toward the thorny subject of politics. They talked about everything that

was wrong with the world, and found their viewpoints reassuringly similar. The old man even seemed to share

Richard's frustration at being unable to make a difference, although in his case it was tempered by patience.

And maybe it was the brandy swilling around his stomach, or maybe it was

just that this old man, this stranger, seemed to understand so much, but

Richard began to find his courage. He began to think that maybe it was time.

He refilled their glasses in the adjoining bar, and sank back into his seat,

feeling only a little uncomfortable with the old man's attentive blue gaze. He took a fortifying sip of his drink, and a deep,

steadying breath.

And he began to tell a story.

It was a story about a television show.

Richard said the show's name, but the old man said he didn't know it, and Richard wasn't surprised.

Ìt was a science-fiction show,' he explained, 'about a man who travelled to other worlds and times. It had a huge fan

following, I mean really dedicated. It was my favourite TV show as a kid, and, when I grew up, when I first got into

publishing, the first job I got was on a magazine devoted to it. And... I mean, by this time, the show wasn't even... It had

ended, like, years before, but this magazine was still going. That's how devoted the fans were. They kept it alive. I guess

this sounds kind of trivial to you, but...'

The old man pursed his lips. 'This television show,' he said, feeling his way around the words as if he had never spoken

them before. 'If I understand you, it brought a great deal of pleasure to a number of people. One might even say inspired

them?'

`Well, yeah,' said Richard. 'They were even talking about bringing it back, because it was still so... I mean, everybody

remembered it. Everybody.'

`Then I would hardly call that trivial.'

Richard smiled. He had made the right choice.

`Well, what happened was,' he resumed, 'one year, in the run-up to Christmas, we — the magazine that is — we

ran a survey. We said to our readers... We said, we know you all love this wonderful old TV show, but how would you make it

even better? What single thing — which single factor of its

production — would you most like to change?

`The response...' He was confident now, gaining momentum. He had rehearsed this many times in his head. 'The

response was enormous. Bigger than I expected. We'd run polls before, but they'd always been about the best moments of

the show, you know? This one, it really seemed to appeal to our readers. And they had ideas, hundreds of them. They wanted

to tone down the violence in one series of the show, and the humour in another. They wanted to change the casting of a

key role, rescue a script that was never made, and warn a certain director that her special-effects team really couldn't

make convincing dinosaurs.

`Some people wanted to keep the show going longer; others wanted it cancelled "while it was still good". A lot of people

thought that, sometimes, especially towards the end, the show was aimed too much at the fans.'

The old man frowned. 'And that wasn't what they wanted?'

Richard shrugged. 'It's hard to explain. We got suggestions like "Put onscreen titles on all the stories", "Stop them

doing comedies" and "Don't let them call it a kids' show". Some people wanted to change things about the

new show, this proposed revival, before it was even written. For a while, I didn't think we'd find any sort of a consensus,

but somehow — well, with my casting vote, and the editor's — somehow, we did.

'So, we did it. We called it a Christmas present to our readers, the show's fans. We...' He paused, and took a deep

breath before he could go on. 'We went back in time, and we

managed to get onto the set of the show, and my editor, he

whispered a warning in the right ear, and that was it. We'd done it.'

He'd blurted out this last part without looking up. When he did look, now, he was relieved, if surprised, to find the old

man's expression unchanged. He did have a question, but it wasn't the expected one.

`Done what, exactly?' asked the old man.

Ìt_ it wasn't a big thing, really,' stammered Richard, wrong-footed. 'I mean, compared to all the... It was just... It

was a hand, that's all. A stupid hand.'

A white eyebrow rode up the old man's lined forehead. 'A hand?'

`There was this episode, you see — and it was a really good episode, one of the best — but there was this one scene,

where the villain stands up from... I guess you'd call it his throne... and there's this hand there. It's supposed to be... it

was one of the production team, holding down a cushion. Just holding a cushion. But he didn't move away in time. His

hand was caught on camera, and it looked like... well, it was like this villain, he had... urn...'

Ànd that's what you changed?'

Richard felt his cheeks colouring. Not so much "changed"," he mumbled, às._ well, "corrected". You have to understand. That hand, it just... it really ticked some people off.'

The old man nodded with mock solemnity, his eyes twinkling with amusement.

Looking for a way to move on, Richard found his scattered thoughts returning him to the question. The one that

hadn't been asked. He felt he needed to explain — at least in part.

`The thing is... the problem was, we couldn't have done... I mean,

it couldn't have been anything too big, because...

`What happened was, we'd made this contact, in the Bureau of Time Travel Regulation, and she was a reader — of the

magazine, I mean. A fan. It might even have been her who had the idea in the first place, who approached my editor. I'm

not sure.

`Time travel was still very new, back then, and the scientists, they didn't know... I mean, what would happen if you

went back in time and murdered your own grandparents? You know, that kind of thing. They I think they just wanted

someone...

`They were doing these experiments, altering small things, unimportant things, in the past, and seeing the effects on

the present, and this... Well, it was just a TV show, right? It's not like it mattered, not in the grand scheme of

things. And that's how... our contact, she was able to persuade them. She got us this time-travel licence, made it part of

their research. We could go back, the two of us, and there was like this whole team of scientists, observers, who came with

us, to make sure we only did what we'd said we'd do.'

Ànd after you had made this... correction? I expect your readers were grateful?' Something about the old man's tone

suggested that he already knew the answer.

Richard grimaced. 'Not exactly,' he said. 'They didn't know, you see. The only people who remembered were my

editor and me. Of course, I should have expected... It was like, when we came back, it was to a different world. I mean, not

much had changed, but when I looked back at articles in the magazine, old articles, articles that had mentioned the

hand, they were... different. Like it had never happened. And it

hadn't, I guess.

Èven the results of the poll had changed. Nobody remembered the hand, so no one had voted for it. Something else had

won. Some other... and everyone thought, like, we'd just made this big claim that we were going to do something for

them, put something right, and we'd backed out.

`We tried to explain. We ran an article. We told everyone what had happened, about the hand, but some people — a

lot of people, I guess — they thought it was a hoax. Some of them were quite angry that we were, you know, taking credit

for this... for their favourite episode.'

`That must have b 188

189

een frustrating for you.'

`Yeah. Frustrating, right. But then... then, I mean, I looked at the episode, the episode as it was now, and I knew...'

The old man's eyes narrowed. 'But that wasn't enough for you, was it?' Richard shifted uncomfortably in his seat. 'It

wasn't... I mean, it just didn't seem...'

`You wanted recognition.' It was a statement, not a judgement.

Ìt wasn't just that. It was... I mean, this whole idea — the poll and the article and all — it really fired up people's

imaginations. We got letters: readers saying that, ifwe were telling them the truth, ifwe could get a time-travel licence, then

why didn't we... I mean, we'd had this poll, and there'd been a clear winner, and as far as everyone was concerned...'

`So, you decided to repeat the exercise,' said the old man.

Richard dropped his head into his hands. 'The next Christmas. We did it again. Better this time.'

`Better?'

`What I mean is... this time we left proof.'

Àh.'

`We were on the set of the show. I sidled up to one of the actors, while no one was watching...

`Well, we got back to the present day, and everything was... it was like the first time. We'd fixed a mistake,

improved this episode, but nobody

remembered what it had been like before. Only, this time... there was an old issue of the magazine. An interview, with this

actor from the show. And there, in black and white: our names. This actor was saying that we'd just turned up and

pointed out how the dates in this episode were all wrong, how they didn't match what had been established before.

`Well, some people were still sceptical, of course, but I mean the proof was there. I was still in college when that episode

was made, I couldn't have... And then someone, some fan with connections somewhere, got a copy of our time-travel

licence, the first one, and posted it on the internet, and... yeah, people started to believe.

`Which only made things worse.

`We were swamped with letters; people who hadn't voted in the poll because they hadn't realised or they'd just changed

their minds, because... Well, suddenly, everyone wanted us to do something. And the ideas... Well, now that it wasn't just

an exercise, now that it was reality, everyone was thinking big. They wanted to make a real difference. We had people

asking us to change the whole direction of the show for its last ten years. Someone wanted us to burn down a publishing

house before they could produce a range of tie-in novels; there

was even an orchestrated campaign to assassinate a certain

TV executive.

`Not that everyone... I mean, some people said we shouldn't change a thing. They were quite passionate about it. They

wrote long, eloquent letters about why they loved those shoddy old dinosaurs, why they thought the odd mistake was all

part of the show's charm. We thought they were... We had a word for them. Not a very flattering one. We named them

after a race of docile animals in an old annual based on the... Well, it doesn't matter. We'd all had these moments, when

this show — this show that we all loved — made us cringe. It was made on a low budget, you see, and sometimes it was...

Some people couldn't see past that. We were making it better, opening it up to a new audience.

Ànd, well, it seemed to be working. Our sales were up, way up. I thought it was because the show itself was more

popular, and maybe it was. Or maybe the fans were just interested in what we were doing, in the whole debate. Either

way, the publishers were happy, and they wanted us to keep up the good work, keep making those Christmas trips.

The Bureau; they were happy too. Happy for us to go further, to make alterations that were bigger and bigger, so they

could study the effects. And each year, they sent fewer observers with us. They trusted us. And we did lose somebody his job

in the end, and I felt awful about that, because I'd assumed he'd go on to do other things instead, but...' Richard

shuddered and shook his head, to dispel the unpleasant memory.

He felt he had been talking for a long time. He looked at the old man, searching for a reaction, some indication of his

thoughts, but there was none.

`When we got back that time,' he ploughed on, 'things had changed. More than usual, I mean. Because it wasn't just

that one guy... We'd stopped him working on the show, and, because of that, there were a dozen other people who'd never

worked on it, and... and it was different, that's all. Not what we'd expected. Not what we'd expected at all.'

`Better?' asked the old man.

Richard thought for a moment, before nodding. 'Better, yeah. But weird. All these episodes I hadn't... I mean, in some

cases I'd seen something similar; in others... And there were articles about them in the magazine, articles about these

episodes that I'd never seen, and my name was on these articles, and that's when I started thinking... It was like my

own past was disappearing, being rubbed out. But... but better, yeah. I mean, I'm not saying I didn't... I did miss a few of

the old episodes, the way they were before, but on the whole... Yeah, better. More serious. More... Just better.'

He was becoming agitated, and the old man responded to that. He leaned forward, rested a paternal hand on Richard's

knee and fixed him with a strong blue gaze.

À tricky business,' he said, 'navigating the course of time. It can be like casting pebbles into a pond. The first ripples

are easy enough to predict, but what happens when the ripples collide; when they begin to affect each other? The patterns

they make... rarely are they the ones we imagined we would see.' His eyes had lost their sparkle, fading to grey. 'And it's all

too easy to become careless, to leave something behind. To drop just one pebble in the wrong spot.'

He lifted his hand, to mime the action as he described it. Then he sat back, regaining his equanimity. 'But you had no cause

for regret, did you? You made things better.' There might have been a mocking edge to his voice, or Richard might have

imagined it.

Ì thought so, yes,' he said, 'and everyone seemed to agree. I thought, maybe it was because I was the one making the

trips; the one who had to remember everything, whose past didn't match his memories. It was cool at first, you know,

knowing stuff that no one else did, but after a while... Maybe that was why I started to...'

He let the sentence tail off, focusing on his breathing, quelling the little ache in his stomach. He was getting ahead of

himself. He had to tell the story, in full, in the order it had happened. Somebody had to know.

Ìt became a tradition, this Christmas trip, this so-called Christmas present. We even started to run a competition, each

year, and the winner got to come with me. My editor had moved on by now, you see, and I'd taken over from him. And I

remember, the last time, I was starting to think I was worried...' He screwed up his face, searching for *the* words.

`You have to... You have to understand what it was like then,' he said. 'At first, it felt like we were the only ones who

could... We felt privileged. But

now... now, the newspapers were full of reports. Things that had been changed, things that could have been. It

wasn't just about a TV show any more. It was... The Bureau, they'd studied what we were doing, got the answers they

wanted, and now...'

Àrid this surprised you?' asked the old man. 'Your government must have seen the possibilities as you did. With

dominion over time, you could remake the world. You could do a great deal of good.' A shadow passed over his face. 'Or

evil. In that respect, time travel is much like any other technological advance.'

Richard sighed. 'Yeah, and that was the problem, kind of. The government, they told us they'd prevented a war here,

a famine there, but how did we know? How did we really know? We only had their word for it, the propaganda.

We don't know, can't know, the way things were, because they changed us too.'

Ànd you didn't believe their claims?'

Ìt's not that. It's just... There are so many bad things in the world, you know, still so many terrible events in the

past, and I used to wonder...'

The old man was a step ahead, as usual. 'Perhaps they tried. Perhaps they learned there are things that cannot be

changed.'

Richard nodded. 'Maybe. Like, I remember this one time... They said there'd been a terrorist attack, near where I

lived. People had died. They'd gone back in time, and they'd stopped it, defused the bomb. Only, a few days after that —

after it was supposed to have happened — there'd been another explosion. A bigger one, somewhere else. And they never

talked about that one, never tried to... I mean, I couldn't help but wonder... Was it meant to happen that way? What if

that second bomb was only planted because the first one failed?'

`Ripples,' breathed the old man, softly.

Ìt just started to feel,' said Richard, 'like nothing was real any more, nothing mattered. Other people felt it, too.

There were letters in the papers, like the ones we'd had to the magazine. Some people were convinced, •

absolutely convinced, by some kind of conspiracy theory, that

the government had ruined their lives, stolen their destinies.

And the civil liberties groups were up in arms because they were locking up people before they'd even... But, I mean,

no one could stop it, because the technology was out there now. We were fighting wars, to stop other countries building

their own time machines, and the more I thought about that... I mean, someone could have undone everything we'd done,

and then maybe we'd go back and redo it all, or change something else, and when would it end?'

191

192

Richard took a deep breath. 'I feel like... For the past few years, I've felt like I've been living in some parallel universe,

like this isn't my life, it isn't where I'm meant to be. Maybe I should have died in that bomb blast. Maybe someone else

died to save me. I don't know.'

`So what,' asked the old man, with a hint of steel in his blue eyes, 'did you do about it?'

'Nothing,' confessed Richard, shamefaced. 'I did nothing.

'I was moving on, you see. I had another job lined up, and it was my last Christmas at the magazine. I only had to make

the trip one more time. I mean, I did think about calling it off, I honestly did, but like I said it had become a tradition, and

anyway the change our readers wanted to make this time, the thing they wanted to put right, was a really good one,

something I'd always wanted to do. And it *was* the last time. My last time, at least.

'I took my assistant editor with me. He was a nice kid — one of those who thought we should have left the programme

alone — but I thought, I'll show him what we do, how it works,

and then, next year, when he's in my seat, it'll be up to

him to decide... His responsibility, not mine. I said to myself .. I promised myself, I wouldn't even know about it. I

wouldn't read the magazine. And of course I wouldn't feel the change when it happened. Maybe then... Maybe, if I was no

longer a part of it, I'd be able to forget. I wouldn't feel like... I wouldn't keep wondering...'

Ànd what happened,' asked the old man, leaning forward again, 'when you returned that final time?'

His calm voice seemed to anchor Richard, giving him something to hold on to, to drag himself out of the sucking grasp

of self-pity, back to the room with the wood panelling and the spitting, dwindling fire.

It was late, and he was tired: bone weary, as if his burden of recent years had worn him down at last. But the story was

almost told, and he owed it to himself to complete it, even if he couldn't shake the feeling that this nameless stranger knew

the ending already.

'It was gone,' he said in a husky voice. 'All of it, gone.'

'The TV show?' asked the old man.

'The show. The magazine...' His stomach ache was back: a dull throbbing sensation, spreading into his chest. 'I

remember, one minute we were laughing, joking...

'We'd talked the first producer of the show into changing a few lines — just a few lines — in the very first episode. Some

lines about the main character's background. We'd done something similar before, only that was in the last episode, and

that... that'd been one of the most popular things we'd done.

`But then, when we got back... The show. The magazine. The Bureau.

'My job. I worked in the same office, at the same desk, but I was a staff writer now, on a magazine about another

show. A show about a policewoman. I'd never even watched it. People... They thought I must have had some kind of

breakdown, that I'd lost my memory. I couldn't very well... They wouldn't believe the truth, so I stopped trying to tell

them. I mean, it's not as if you can blame them. There's no such thing as time travel, right? It's fantasy. Science fiction.

Like the TV show.

Ì looked it up on the internet; the show, I mean. It still existed. It ran for a good few years. It's just that... Well, it never

had the same following. People don't remember it, not in the same way. It was good, they say — a good, solid show — but it

didn't have that magic. They say it took itself too seriously. It was po-faced. Dull. They didn't fall in love with it, this time.

They let it die.'

Ànd the Bureau?' asked the old man.

Ì don't know. I'll never know what happened there, exactly. Best guess? I think the TV show was responsible,

somehow... You said it inspired people. Well, I think... What if it inspired somebody — maybe a few people — to work in

time travel? To do research? What if those people made a breakthrough? And what if that never happened now?

`When we got back — my assistant editor, a couple of observers and me — we just... The offices were deserted, the

computers gone. I looked... I tried to find Susan, my contact at the Bureau. I searched for her in directories, census

records, but... I don't know what she could have done to help me, anyway. I don't know what anyone can do. It's not like

I can go back again. Not now. What I've done... I can't ever correct it.'

His words sank into a heavy silence, punctuated by the final pops and cracks from the fireplace. Only now, now

that the flames had died, did Richard realise how dim the electric light was in this room. The stranger's face was cast

into shadow, his eyes dark. Richard couldn't predict his reaction, couldn't even be sure that the old man had believed him,

didn't know what he would say — or could say — if he had.

`Perhaps,' said the 1934

old man at length, 'it's better this way, have you thought about that?'

Richard nodded glumly. 'Sure. I've thought about it, yeah, and I know I said I was worried about what was happening,

about how time travel was being used, but...'

`Now you can't help but think about its possible applications.'

`Yeah. That's it, yeah. Now, every time there's an accident or some huge disaster or a war or... or whatever, I can't

help but wonder... Could it have been prevented? If I hadn't...'

Ànd what if you hadn't done as you did?' asked the old man, his voice still quiet but suddenly stronger, sterner. 'What if

the people of this world could still travel in time, if you could restore that ability to them? How would you feel then? Do

you have all the answers now? It seems to me, young man, that you're behaving exactly as you did before. Life is full of

possibilities, and yet you insist on fixating upon those that have been lost, rather than on those that remain. Now, why do

you think that is, hmm"

`Because,' said Richard without hesitation, 'whatever else may or may not be true — whatever other people might do,

or might have done — I know one thing for certain. I know what I did. I... I dropped that pebble into the wrong place;

several pebbles, in fact, because it wasn't just that one thing, it was the

combination of ripples, and. . maybe it was only a small thing, but I did it. I'm responsible. I destroyed something beautiful.'

`Yes,' agreed the old man, without a trace of sympathy, 'you did.'

When Richard woke, the room was cold. A harsh winter light streamed through the gaps in the heavy curtains, and

when he pulled them back, he saw that the sky outside was a perfect blue. The snow lay deep, pure white, like a blank

slate on which anything could be written. It was magical.

He felt good. Refreshed. Almost impossibly so. As if *he* hadn't just slept fully clothed in a stiff-backed chair. He

remembered the old man's blue eyes in his head, soothing him, telling him it would be all right, and making him believe

it. Telling him to rest, now.

Had he said goodnight? He didn't remember. He might have passed out, he thought with a twinge of

embarrassment, and the old man might have left him to sleep.

Those blue eyes. That gentle but authoritative voice.

He hoped he hadn't been too drunk, hadn't said anything stupid. But he didn't have a hangover.

He remembered the early stages of the conversation — the weather, their surroundings, politics — but then? Just a

vague feeling that he had poured out his heart to this stranger, revealed intimate details about himself, details that he

couldn't remember now. But it was all right, because he had no doubt that the man had understood. He had

listened... and, in so doing, he had somehow relieved Richard of a burden that he could feel now only by its blessed

absence.

Only later would he learn that the old man was no longer in the lodge: that, indeed, there was no record of his ever having

stayed there. He would look out over the snow again, see that there were no footsteps leading from the building, and he

would wonder.

But he would forget all that, in time. It wasn't worth worrying about.

Later in the morning, Richard would take a long walk, breathe in the cold, crisp air, and think about his

return to work the following week. He had been working on the same magazine — writing about the same police show;

the favourite programme of his childhood — for so long now, he had begun to fear he had no ideas left. But they would

come to him now, bright and fresh. Richard would stare up into the deep blue sky, and feel an inexplicable thrill in

his stomach... and he would reflect that, in that timeless moment, just for this one day, anything in the world seemed

possible.

But then, why wouldn't it? After all, it was Christmas.

Lily

Jackie Marshall

Seated at the back of the church, the Doctor was in plain sight of each member of the congregation as they crowded in

from the cold night, 19

a 5

nd he was attracting more than his fair share of sidelong glances.

Ì think they're wondering who I am,' he remarked to his companion.

Ì think they're more likely wondering what the hell you're

wearing,' Sarah Jane Smith returned succinctly. 'When

people turn up for the annual carol service, they don't expect to see someone who looks like he's dressed to play cricket on

a summer afternoon in Edwardian England.'

Age, the Doctor reflected wryly, had not softened Sarah's tendency for plain speaking. He studied her quietly as several

people, ruddy-faced from the sudden flush of warmth inside the church, paused and exchanged greetings with her.

Outwardly, Sarah looked to have changed little over the years. Her hair was as dark as ever — although Sarah freely

admitted that that was due entirely to regular visits to the hairdressers — and her figure still trim. But although her

warm smile was a familiar one, she used it far less frequently than of old. All those wild adventures with his previous

incarnations had failed to dim her natural sparkle; it had taken years of living back in her own world to do that. And

Lily, of course.

Lily sat very still between them. Sarah had said the child was slight for her age, perhaps because she was inclined to

regard food as an unwelcome intrusion into her world. Lily had an unnerving tendency to stare, unblinking, at

whatever currently held her interest, but right now her dark eyes were unfocused, her lips slightly parted. She was rapt,

listening to the organ as it filled the small church up to its high wooden beams with a rich swell of sound.

A family occasion such as this had ensured that the church played host to a sizeable flock this December evening, and

every effort had been made to welcome them. A great vase of holly and trailing ivy had been positioned at the side of the

lectern, while pots of bright poinsettias blazed at strategic intervals. Small children, clutching their parents' hands,

paused to stare up at the tall Christmas tree placed by the font, and point excitedly at the glittering star perched

lopsidedly on the top. Lily hadn't been interested in the tree even when Sarah had drawn her attention to it. She'd

skipped round her grandmother, singing loudly, until the sonorous tones of the organ rippling through an assortment

of well-loved carols had caught her attention. Then she'd been suddenly quiescent, allowing herself to be seated on the

pew while she listened.

Now, as the congregation was called good-humouredly to order by the vicar, Lily began to fidget, squirming on her

cushion and pulling faces. But the vicar's welcoming speech was brief and to the point; there would be no sermon

today, only a few Bible readings and as many carols — old favourites and new — that could be packed into the next hour

and a half.

As soon as the first carol started, Lily became still once again. As the congregation began to sing with a vigour born of

familiarity and affection, so Lily's voice rose alongside them. She was word perfect. Carol after carol, Lily knew them all,

never faltering over the more archaic words and expressions in the old favourites. She showed particular enthusiasm for

some of the livelier numbers, swaying in time to the music and clapping her hands. She never once spoke to either the

Doctor or her grandmother, completely spellbound by the music flowing around her.

The church soon warmed enough for Sarah, and many others, to unfasten their coats; the Doctor felt that this change

in temperature had little to do with the wall heaters glowing red from high up on the white-washed walls, but rather

more to do with the sheer energy and goodwill generated by the

congregation. Stealing a sideways glance at Sarah, the

Doctor was pleased to see a more relaxed expression on her face, as if the frozen knot of anxiety inside her had thawed

a little in the presence of such glowing Christmas cheer.

During the Bible readings, Lily stayed silent but began wriggling about and fiddling with her hair. Sarah said nothing, but

the Doctor was aware of her watching Lily closely in case her behaviour suddenly deteriorated and it became advisable

for them to remove her; they had taken seats at the back of the church so that they could make a relatively unobtrusive exit

should Lily's behaviour go beyond all hope of redemption.

Several times she kicked the back of the pew in front of her, and the people occupying it swung round to look at her.

Although they frowned initially, as soon as they saw the little girl they turned back without saying a word. One smiled

rather apologetically at Sarah. It seemed that the village knew Lily well enough even though she only visited her

grandmother for holidays. Maybe those holidays had been more frequent than Sarah had led him to believe.

The service drew to a close with one last barnstorming modern carol that had everyone joining in with enthusiasm.

When the last sounds faded the vicar stepped forward, a well-pleased smile on his face, and announced that refreshments

were available: coffee, tea, orange squash and homemade mince pies.

`Would you —' The 19

D6

197octor got no further. Lily was making her disinterest in refreshments known by trying to shimmy past

her grandmother. Sarah and the Doctor made a valiant attempt to

stop her, but Lily squealed in protest, kicked Sarah

on the shins and wiggled away. Sarah threw a look at the Doctor that spoke volumes. Fortunately, the headlong

nature of Lily's dash to

freedom left a clear trail through the press of people starting to gather for refreshments. The Doctor and Sarah

plunged after her, out through the church doors.

The night and the cold swept around them like a dark cloak, eclipsing the memory of the bright sanctuary of the church

with all its warmth and festivity. Sarah shivered and tugged up the collar of her coat, hurriedly fastening it. The Doctor

noted wistfully that the anxious look was back in her eyes again, even though Lily hadn't gone far and was doing nothing at

all alarming.

The little girl was standing on the path outside the church doors, looking up at the sky. Her eyes were bright and

deep, her mouth open wide with fascination. Fat, feathery snowflakes were spiralling down, and she held out her hands,

squealing with glee as one flake after another fell on her palms like frozen kisses.

`Snow!' she shrieked in a wild, high voice of delight. `Snowsnowsnowsnow...'

`Yes, snow,' Sarah returned tiredly. She raised an eyebrow at the Doctor and sighed. 'This is going to be interesting.'

Ìn what way?'

`Lily loves snow.'

`So I see.' The Doctor watched as the little girl giggled and capered, clapping her hands in delight as the snowflakes

fluttered all around her like a cloud of white moths. 'Is that a problem?'

`Yes,' Sarah said flatly. 'It is. She plays in the snow until she's crying with cold, but if anyone tries to bring her inside

she screams herself sick. When it snowed last winter, Lauren and Will ... well, a white Christmas didn't do much for the

relationship.'

Àh.' Lauren was Sarah's daughter, Will, her husband. 'But you said Lily was unpredictable. It's possible she may react

quite differently this year.'

`Maybe.' Sarah didn't look at all convinced. 'I know you must think I'm terribly negative. It just helps to be

prepared for trouble. Being blindsided isn't good.'

`Neither is living with constant anxiety,' the Doctor reminded her. 'And we're not trying to get Lily out of the snow

just yet, are we?'

`No,' Sarah admitted. 'But we'd still better get moving. I don't fancy being caught up in the rush once all those

refreshments have vanished and everyone is on the road trying to get home at once.'

`Do we have to walk back on the road?' The Doctor smiled. 'Why not take the same way we came, through the woods?'

`Because it's cold and it's snowing, that's why.'

Èxactly. It's snowing and it's nearly Christmas Come on, Sarah Jane! I can't believe your sense of adventure has

failed you so completely! A ten-minute walk on a footpath through a small English wood! Not a hundred-mile

hike through a blizzard on an ice planet.' He smiled, the most winning smile he had at his disposal, and he had a notion

that this particular incarnation was rather gifted in that department.

Sarah hesitated a moment. Then she smiled back, and this time it

was a genuine smile that actually reached her eyes.

'You don't change, do you? Well, I mean, obviously you change your appearance, but down inside, in your heart —'

`Hearts.'

`Hearts. In all the things that really count, you're still the same, aren't you?' Àren't you?'

Sarah shrugged. 'I don't know. Sometimes I wonder about that. I wonder a lot.' She pulled her torch out of her pocket

and flicked it on; a dim, pale beam shone out vaguely through the darkness. 'Come on, Lily.' Sarah raised her voice a

fraction. 'We're going to walk home through the woods, would you like that?'

For the first time, Lily responded to Sarah's voice. She stood still for a moment, staring up at her grandmother with

bewildered eyes as if she was struggling to take in what had been said. Then, 'Yes!' she cried, clapping her hands in

delight. `Yesyesyes!'

`Come on, then.' Sarah took the lead, casting the torchlight in front of her, although the Doctor was inclined to place

more faith in the,natural light from the moon and the gathering snow. He kept behind Sarah, one hand stretched out to

shepherd Lily in the right direction should she show any inclination to stray.

They were the first to leave, and they had nearly reached the gate before some children spotted the falling snow and

raced outside with shrieks and whoops of joy. A few curious adults peered out through the doors with more caution and

less enthusiasm. Lily looked over her shoulder and eyed the

children with disinterest as one of the bigger boys began

scraping at the grass in a valiant but rather premature attempt to make a snowball. Then she skipped past Sarah and

the Doctor without a backwards glance, heading towards the woodland path.

The snow was falling more thickly now and the footpath wound through the woods before them like a white carpet.

Leafless trees flanked the path, snow beginning to coat the stark branches. Lily didn't seem to feel the cold; she fiercely

resisted Sarah's attempt to put on her mittens, swiping her hand away. Then she danced on ahead, skipping and laughing,

sticking out her tongue to catch the snowflakes. Lost in her own world, she paid Sarah and the Doctor no attention at all.

Sarah sighed. 'Not so long ago the villagers would have called her a changeling. A fairy child left in exchange for a

human baby. Sometimes I get to feeling that's not so far from the truth.'

Ìt must be hard,' the Doctor said. 'Trying to understand how her mind works.'

`There isn't really any understanding it. We know she has Autistic Spectrum Disorder, and all we can do is to find ways of

dealing with her behaviour. But what works one day doesn't the next.'

Àh. A steep learning curve.'

À bloody never-ending learning curve.' Sarah's expression was bleak. `Lauren and Will cope really well, considering,

but I don't think they'd have come this far if they hadn't been able to hand Lily over to me as often as they do. I only

wish, well, that I could do more.'

Will the situation improve as Lily gets older? She's at school now, you said?'

Ìt's taking some of the pressure off Lauren and Will, but it's too early to say what long term impact it'll have. None of us

like to think about the future; getting through each day is hard enough most of the time. Any forward planning we do

tends to revolve around surviving that particular day with our sanity intact.'

`That bad?'

Ìt can be. Music is our best ally: it's a good way to get Lily's attention or calm her down, hence the carol service. I take

her to musical concerts around here and the locals are pretty good about it, although that would, of course, change

rapidly if I brought her into situations she couldn't handle. All it would take is for Lily to over-react and attack a kid,

and there goes the tolerance. Which is pretty much what's happened to her at home.'

`Then Lily's times here must be precious. You say you wish you could do more, but you're doing something for her

that her parents can't.'

Ì suppose so. I never thought of it like that.'

They paused for a moment, watching Lily as she danced ahead of them, twisting and turning in the snowflakes like a

tiny mad dervish.

Ìt's strange,' Sarah said. 'She's such a beautiful little girl, and at moments like this she seems so normal, so perfect,

and yet...' She hesitated, a rueful smile on her lips. 'In her own way she's more alien than anything I met when I

travelled with you.' She shot the Doctor a glance 'Ironic. But not very funny.'

`No,' the Doctor said softly.

Sarah's cottage was at the end of a narrow cul-de-sac, bordered

by woods and fields. She had left the outside lamp on;

it shone hazily ahead of them through the flurry of snow as they came to the end of the woodland path and walked the last

few yards to the gate. Sarah opened it, and Lily skipped through without hesitation.

`Now comes the fun part.' Sarah seemed to be mentally bracing herself for trouble as she watched Lily dart around the

garden, exploring the suddenly unfamiliar snowscape.

The Doctor stretched out one hand and touched her shoulder lightly. 'No,' he said, shaking his head. 'Not yet.'

Sarah shot him an impatient look. 'Waiting won't make it any easier to get her inside, I thought I'd explained that.'

`That wasn't why I asked you to wait.'

`Then why?'

`Look at her,' the Doctor said gently, opening the palm of one hand and gesturing Sarah to see what he saw.

Lily was dancing in the snow, a spark of brightness, her red coat a muted splash of colour against the dark sky and

white snow. She twirled round and round, her arms outstretched as if she wanted to capture all the snow in the world

and hug it to her and never let it go. Her dark hair whipped in damp strands across her face as she spun, and her eyes

were wide and dreamy.

`What do you see?' the Doctor asked.

`What do you mean?'

`When you look at her, what do you see?'

Sarah took a deep breath. 'I see... my grandchild. Someone who's part of me, a changeling that I'll never understand,

that I can never make happy —' Àh.'

Àh?'

`She's happy now. Can't you see it? Because of you.'

`Yes, but —'

`No buts, Sarah Jane.' The Doctor pressed a finger to, her lips and was rewarded with a faint smile. 'You're still the

bravest person I know. You're doing all you can.'

Ìt'll never be enough.'

Àll you can is enough.'

She pulled a face. 'One day at a time.'

Not always.'

Sarah looked at him, raising one querying eyebrow.

`Sometimes one moment at a time is better.' The Doctor held out his hand. `May I have the pleasure, Miss Smith?'

`What?'

`May I have the pleasure of this dance?'

`You want me to dance with you?'

`Why not? Lily's dancing. I think we should too.'

Sarah took his hand. Her lips twitched. 'What is this? Your if you can't beat 'em, join 'em strategy?'

`Something like that.' The Doctor slipped one arm around Sarah's waist and began to spin her lightly round and

round.

Sarah tried unsuccessfully to smother her laughter. 'We must look absolutely ridiculous!'

Ì'm quite sure we do.' The Doctor grinned and picked up pace, wildly waltzing them both around the garden.

Sarah dropped the torch and, giggling like a schoolgirl, left it lying where it

fell; the cottage lamp and the downy swirl of snow gave all the light they needed.

Lily paused. Tilting her head to one side, she observed the Doctor and Sarah as if she didn't quite know what to make of

their behaviour. Then she hurled herself at them, her fingers clawing at their arms. Her eyes were bright and begging. 'I

want to dance with you! Let me, let me, let me!'

Òf course we'll let you, sweetheart,' Sarah said, her voice catching in her throat.

The Doctor said nothing. His smile deepened.

Very carefully, Sarah took hold of those small, cold hands and drew Lily into the dance.

A Yuletide Tale Part Two

Being the Second Part by Mr D.R. Stone

Mindful of his previous encounters of this Yuletide Eve, Poor Tom considered that it might be best to conceal himself

and await developments before making his presence known.

Presently, three figures emerged from what was something like a worker's but and something like a wardrobe.

One, Poor Tom recognised as a Soldier. (A Soldier lad lodged, once, with the Cumbundersnatches, until seven of

the eldest daughters, and Mrs Cumbundersnatch herself, had fallen into the Family Way, whereupon the Soldier had

been summarily defenestrated with a shovel and buried in the cellar by Mr Cumbundersnatch.) The Soldier was

clutching a packet of papers, sealed with wax and tied up with string.

The second was a girl, but barely into her majority, dressed most

inappropriately and carrying what appeared to

be a malformed cricket-bat of some metallic substance.

201

203

204

The third was a quite profoundly inconsequential man in a hat.

Ìt's a werry worrying thing you're telling me, Doctor,' the Soldier was saying. 'A werry worrying thing indeed.'

`Be that as it may, Sergeant Thackary.' This from the man in the hat. 'It is imperative that you get this information to

Brigadier-General CholmoldleyCritchton. Can I trust you to do that, Sergeant?'

`For Queen and Country,' said the Soldier, standing for a moment to attention, 'you can trust me with ... a-a-a-

ch000!'

Òh dear, Sergeant,' said the man in the hat. 'It does appear that I might have given you a cold.'

For a while after Sergeant Thackary had left, Ace amused herself by poking through the debris in the totter's yard. There

was something about the various dumb and mismatched items that was akin to going on a completely historically

inaccurate, pirate rollercoaster-ride.

There were several more concussions in the middle-distance, out beyond the wrought-iron gates. There was an odd

taste to the air, and she really hoped that the Doctor had been telling the truth when he had said that the Slaarg mutagen-

spores wouldn't affect her.

After a while, she wandered back to the TARDIS, and found the Doctor outside it. He was just standing there. For

some reason, Ace was reminded of old Droopy cartoons... simply standing there, while chaos raged around him, as if he'd

had nothing to do with it at all.

Ì still don't get the point, Professor,' she said. 'I mean, so what? Why

should anybody care if the Slaarg are dismantling what's basically a glorified theme park? They built it in the first place,

didn't they?'

The Doctor shook himself slightly, then turned his head to regard her, as though he had completely forgotten her

existence. `Mm?'

`Dickensworld.' Ace shuddered at the thought of it, even though the actuality of it was all around her. 'Who in the

entire galaxy is going to miss it, apart from a bunch of aliens who didn't know what the hell they were doing in the first

place and got it all wrong?'

The Doctor frowned. 'That's exactly the point, Ace. The Slaarg got it wrong — completely and utterly wrong — when

they built their pleasure world and stocked it with what they thought of as simulacra. They didn't understand what

humanity was, exactly, but they copied it. Down to the synthetic DNA.'

He waved a hand toward a skyline that even now appeared to be pin fire with the nimbus of Death Rays. 'The people out

there are simplified and twisted, but they're real. As are the other biological entities the Slaarg copied. The suffering is

actual. And the Slaarg are wiping them out en masse.

`That's not going to happen, now. The pathogen with which I infected Thackary will present itself as a common cold

in the human analogues... but it's sudden death to the Slaarg on

an accelerated vector. Most of them will survive, I'm

sure, if they get off the planet and declare it a Plague Zone. They probably won't bother to obliterate it from orbit. I got the

idea from a chap I used to know. An old companion, apparently, used to go around for coffee with him regularly. I'm

sure I'll remember his name presently...'

`Now, hang on,' said Ace. 'If these people are... if they're real people, in a sense, then you've just sent out a real guy to

be gobbled up by the first Slaarg who comes across him and...'

`Hello, what's this?' said the Doctor. 'It looks like a small cat. Black-patched, if I'm not entirely mistaken. It looks a

bit hungry... now, I'm sure I had a bit of fish, somewhere, in my pocket...'

As the big, blue wardrobe vanished into thin air, Poor Tom paid it not the slightest heed. He spat out a fishbone, and

rolled over on the junk pile, onto his now full stomach, and dropped contentedly to sleep.

Thanks to the Kindly Gentleman in the hat, it seemed that it would be a Merry Yuletide after all.

And the same to you, too.

...Be Forgot

Cavan Scott & Mark Wright

205

Òh, Goddess,' Benny swore as she stood looking out over the Grand Trianon, the much talked about centrepiece of the

great Braxiatel Collection. Not again.'

The enormous Christmas tree plonked down in the middle of the grounds she could cope with. Even the oversized fairy

sitting atop the conical festive growth had a dirty look in its eyes

that appealed to Benny's darker leanings. And the

liberal fall of snow (artificially generated, natch) that covered everything as far as the eye could see Was just about

bearable, even if it did crunch in an overenthusiastically happy manner whenever you walked across it. At a pinch, the

android robins that sang and hopped cheerfully from branch to branch were just about doable. However there was no

excuse for the comedy snowmen lumbering around the grounds, greeting everybody with a cheery wave.

It was just so... tacky. Every year he tried this without fail. An annual PR stunt that Brax said was good for business

and moral. She'd just about got used to it in the intervening years, but, in light of recent events, it felt wrong this year.

Benny sipped on the eggnog latte clutched between her mittened hands and half crunched, half stomped across the

grounds to her quarters. Even the sight of Hass, the new Martian gardener, being snowballed by a gang of the snowmen,

couldn't raise a smile from her.

A good few hours later, the crimson liquid swilled around the glass in her hand. All around her came the sound of

merriment. People were dancing. People were flirting. People were enjoying themselves. Hass, forced back into his cold

suit, was belting out an enthusiastic but misguided rendition of Twist and Shout at the karaoke mike, and the visiting

lecturer in Sintran Cryptology Was doing his best to turn the curvy assistant from Accounts into a cracker. So far, he

wasn't having much success in pulling her. (Benny secretly thought that the only reason Brax had an Accounts

department on the Collection was to add a traditional feel to the staff Christmas party. Certainly every invoice that

she'd put into them was still awaiting payment...) But in the

midst of all the festivities, Benny's Christmas spirit felt as

flat as twenty-year-old dandelion and burdock.

This was stupid. Why was she sitting in the corner wishing that she was tucked up at home reading Peter a bedtime

story when she could be tucked up at home reading Peter a bedtime story?

`You've got to show your face,' Jason had said earlier. 'I'm going,' he'd said to Peter, snookumsly. 'Aren't I? Aren't I?'

`Why have I got to show my face?' she'd asked. 'They've seen my face.' Ìt'll be fun,' her beloved (again) offered.

'Won't it? Won't it?'

Benny had arched an eyebrow. And then she'd caved. Persuaded by his superior argument.

She'd got dolled up that night, shaken the moths out of the frock. She was here. And now he actually wasn't.

She'd thought that perhaps this party was a chance to start afresh. Everybody knew that her default setting was

to despise the festive season, she usually got through it by riding out the storm under her duvet with a Wale and the Only

Fools and Vervoids marathon on Galactic Gold. But, things were different now. She was a mum. She was making a damn

good stab at family life. Her dad was back. Well, back in time. The sitcom of her life wasn't simply Professor Bernice

Summerfield anymore; it was Professor Bernice Summerfield and Friends. But, and she wanted to be absolutely

clear about this, she was loving it. It was great. Things sorted, even keel and all that. There was just something

niggling her.

As the party unfolded around her (was that really Bev Tarrant under the mistletoe with a nineteen-year-old physics

student?) Benny wandered over to one of the Mansion House's huge windows that overlooked the grounds. Night had

fallen, but the seasonal trappings were still there as they had been that afternoon, the Christmas tree rising into the sky

like a large black triangle.

She put her glass down and placed her chin sullenly over her folded arms on the windowsill, sighing.

The rebuilding of the Braxiatel Collection in the wake of the Fifth Axis occupation was nearly finished, the grounds

were almost back to normal. Adrian and his building crew had worked wonders.

But none of it really pleased Benny.

A war had been fought here. Dear friends had been lost. And, just as was happening across the grounds, people were

rebuilding their lives, herself included. The wounds of conflict were healing, physically and mentally. As each new brick

was added to rebuild destroyed buildings, the ugly cracks were being papered over. That was it, she realised. To her, the

snow and festive trappings were like a sickly sweet icing covering a stale fruitcake. Hiding the taste. Wiping out the

memories.

She could spend a quiet Christmas with Jason and Peter. Be a family and move on from the occupation. She imagined

207

Peter's face as he opened his first present under the holo-tree in the living room, and the thought filled her with joy...

followed by a sick, hollow feeling.

It wasn't right. We can't enjoy ourselves. We have to remember. Damn it

She knocked the glass of wine back and turned to scan the room again. Yep,

that was definitely Bev snogging the face off the increasingly startled-looking nineteen-year-old. And, of course, there was

still no sign of Jason.

That afternoon, he'd slipped away and said something about seeing a man about a reindeer, and that's the last she'd

seen of him.

Happy Christmas, Bernice Summerfield.

`Well, Mr Kane, I hope my doorstep is comfortable this evening,' she growled under her breath and started to stalk

towards the door.

`Leaving so shoon?' slurred Miss Jones, desperately trying to hold onto a Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer ice-sculpture

in an attempt to stay vertical. `Yes, I want to get back and pick up Peter from the babysitter.'

Àwwwww,' hiccupped the Administrator. 'Well, Chrishmash iss for the little onsh isn't it?'

`So they say,' Benny replied through thin lips.

Òff you trot then,' Miss Jones commanded, sliding slowly down Rudolf's neck. 'And remember, goodwill to all men!'

Benny vowed to remember that little pearl of wisdom when she caught up with Jason.

`Lights.'

The room was instantly illuminated. Bernice had checked in with the babysitter, seen Peter sleeping peacefully and

tiredly decided to leave him where he was.

Things were tidy here for a change, and in the corner, a small tree began to flash gaudy colours in sequence, and the

holographic supernova blazed at the peak. The last bit was Jason's idea, claiming that fairies on tree had always scared

him witless as a kid (ha!).

A snowglobe featuring a grinning Yeti in a paper hat knocked the tree flying. Not bad, her googly was improving.

Shame her temper wasn't.

Bernice flopped down on the sofa and stared at the ceiling. Some Christmas. The first with a loving husband and

a gorgeous son and somehow she hadn't managed to be here with either of them. At least she still had... wait a minute...

where the hell was Wolsey? Surely he hadn't abandoned her too?

A mew from the kitchen answered her question and for the first time in hours a smile crept across her face.

`Hey, Wols,' she called out. 'I suppose you want feeding. Hope you don't expect turkey and stuffing.'

The increasingly chubby cat padded slowly into the lounge, weaving its way towards her. Something glinted on his collar

and Benny's eyes narrowed. What was that? She crouched down to greet him and Wolsey purred loudly as he rubbed

himself happily against his mistress. Benny fumbled with Wolsey's collar and found a burgundy envelope tied to the collar

with a strip of silver tinsel. It came away easily in her hand, and she found that it was fastened with an elaborate wax

seal.

Benny turned the sturdy envelope round. There was no addressee, just two words written in gold ink:

Read Me

Benny crunched her way through the snow, wrapping a scarf round her neck so violently she was in serious danger of

throttling herself. 'You've done it this time, Jason Kane!'

First he had insisted she went to a tedious party and then was a no-show himself and now he had the nerve to send her

on some ridiculous treasure hunt. She was all for romantic gestures, really, she was, but breakfast in lied on a Sunday

was far more preferable than this song and dance that was obviously designed to lead her to her Christmas present.

The card inside the envelope had simply read:

Deck the hal s with *bowels of* hol y,

Join the choir or you'll *be* sorry.

He had obviously thought that bad poetry would brighten her mood. He would soon find out he was wrong. The only

reason she was enduring this pathetic wild-goose chase was to give the dopy idiot a piece of her mind.

When she barged through the doors of the Collection's inter-faith chapel, the visiting choir from the Tovey system

had already packed up. The cold chapel was empty, apart from a lone figure at the front. As she headed down the aisle,

her best ticking-off finger was raised and ready to let rip, until she realised that the figure was too small and frail to be

Jason.

Àh, Professor Summerfield,' said Professor Yakkle, the head of physics research, as he turned to see who had just

walked in. 'I'm afraid you missed the Tovians. A most talented group.'

Benny had to admit that the smile spreading across the turquoise face of the usually tetchy academic was a little

unsettling. Was nobody immune to this sense of festive cheer?

Òh, Professor,' she said awkwardly. 'I didn't expect to find you here.'

`Nor I you. It's not my idea ofproper religion, of course. Not enough blood. But some of those carols are very touching.

We have a similar festival on my homeworld. I always enjoyed Wastletide when I was a hatchling. I can almost smell the

blood-pudding my mother used to make.'

Benny was convinced that any minute those misty eyes would spill a tear, but Yakkle pulled himself together at the

last second.

`Yes, well. Haven't got all night, I suppose. They'll be wanting to lock up.' He straightened the half-moon glasses

perched on his beak before snapping his fingers. 'Oh, I'm a silly old fossil! I almost forgot.'

`Forgot what, Professor?'

Yakkle delved around in the pockets of his tweed suit. Àh, yes! Knew I had it.' The Professor pulled not one, but two

burgundy envelopes from his pocket. He thrust the second at Benny who frowned in irritation.

`He was most insistent that I give this to you. Sorry it's a bit crumpled.'

As Benny took it, Yakkle pushed past her and began to hobble to the main doors, not looking back.

`Must be getting on. Work to be done.' He shouted over his shoulder. `Merry Wastletide, Bernice. May the blood

flow warmly for you.'

`Same to you,' she called back absently before he left her standing alone in the chapel. As the heavy doors closed, Benny

ripped open the second envelope.

Ì suppose you think you're being clever don't you?' Benny yelled

as she pushed her way into the Archive. 'But get

this, I am totally and utterly unseasonally miffed with you, Jason Kane! And, just to qualify my level of miffedness, there is

no way you are seeing what's in my Christmas stockings tomorrow morning! This is in no way comedy miffedness.

Despite me coming to realise that I occasionally actually enjoy being miffed at you, this is not one of those times. This is

genuine miff!'

The endless lines of bookshelves answered with silence.

He had to be in here. Where else would he be?

Ànd I don't like the insinuation of the last clue, now I come to think of it.' Benny uncrumpled the card that she had

pulled from the envelope and read aloud:

Rocking *around the Christmas tree,*

***Is* nothing but history for you and me.**

She recrumpled the card for the hundredth time. 'If this is some sick way of dumping me in the middle of the festive season,

Kane, you'll find out the real meaning of Boxing Day!'

Still nothing. The dusty files and books stared back at her as if they were wondering what the hell she was doing here on

their day off If they had ears they would also have been blushing to hear the stream of colourful metaphors that spilled

from her mouth.

`By now, I guess you're getting a little angry.'

Jason's voice made her jump and she span round to find him standing there, that stupid, lop-sided grin plastered

over his face.

Ùnderstatement of the millennium, chum! Who the hell do you

think you are?' Benny started forward, one fist raised.

Òh, and before you think about using my vital organs as Christmas tree baubles,' Jason continued, 'you didn't think

I'd be stupid enough210

to face you in person, did you?' Jason's face shimmered slightly. 'Joseph's holo-recorder is *very*

useful at times like this.'

Bernice stamped her feet on the tiled floor, letting out an exasperated scream. Òooh, Jason!'

`You've got one more place to find on your treasure hunt,' the holo-Jason smirked. 'And there are no more bad

rhymes.'

Thank the Goddess for small mercies.

Àll you need to do is visit the place where old acquaintances are never forgot and the flowers that always bloom will

not fade.'

Benny looked heavenwards. 'What's that supposed to mean, you annoying little...'

The smirking image of Jason faded away to nothing.

Thankfully, once she'd calmed down, it hadn't taken long to figure out where to go. Her breath misted in the orange

glow from the lamps lighting the pathway down which she trudged. It was snowing again and she pulled her coat

around her.

She'd walked down this path a lot in the months following the occupation. The Garden of Remembrance had been

erected in memory of Mister Crofton, the Braxiatel Collection's head gardener, who had given his life during the final

battle to regain their liberty. It was the one place where it didn't

feel wrong to remember those horrible events and the

innocence they'd all lost.

Her pace quickened as she approached the entrance to the garden. It was small and unassuming, much like the old

gardener himself had been, and he'd attended this particular patch of ground with devotion.

As she stepped into the confines of the garden, Bernice felt a flush of anger as she realised somebody was standing

before the crystalline flower that had been placed in the centre of the area. The silhouette was out of place here, yet held a

sickening sense of familiarity to it. This wasn't a place for strangers, this was for those who had been there, those who

had lost...

`He was an amazing gardener,' said a voice. 'His prize-winning Krynoid at the Altair in Bloom festival is talked of to

this day. The things he could do with a pair of pruning shears...' The stranger let out an appreciative whistle. 'He did

some work in the cloisters once. I was going to offer him a permanent job, but Irving beat me to it.'

Bernice watched as the figure pulled a handkerchief from the pocket of his long frock coat and knelt to dust away the

snow that had fallen on the crystal flower. 'Rest well, old friend.'

As the figure rose, Bernice stepped forward, that swell of anger rising in her chest again. 'Well,' she said. 'You took your

bloody time.'

The Doctor turned to face her, smiling Snow dusted the shoulders of his coat and hung in that ridiculous mass of

curls, but somehow didn't melt. He looked exactly the same as when she'd last seen him. 'Hello, Bernice.'

`You know, just at the back of my head, I kind of thought it

might be you. It was so not Jason to do this.'

The Doctor cocked his head to one side, letting snow cascade to the ground. Èvery now and then I like to be predictable.'

Bernice found there was a peculiar anger inside her, and hated it. She started to walk away. The old routines don't

work with me anymore. I saw through them a long time ago.'

`Bernice, wait!' She heard the Doctor move after her, and despite herself, she turned.

`So you came to apologise?'

Àpologise for what?'

`The war! The occupation! When you weren't here!'

Àll's well that ends well, though.'

`So you've just come back to join in the annual Annoy Bernice Summerfield contest.'

The Doctor held his arms wide in appeasement. 'AI_ I'm sensing a certain hostility. I wish you'd tell me what I'd done.'

Ì thought heroes were supposed to fight their archenemies, not leave it up to the supporting cast.'

`Well —'

`Why didn't you come? We waited for you, but you didn't come.'

`Have you ever heard the expression: too many masterbakers spoil the Slarvian broth?'

`We needed you!' She was shocked at how angry he was starting to make her. Ìt wasn't my fight.'

Ìt's always your fight!' she bellowed, taking a step towards him, absolutely off the leash now, ready to do anything.

The Doctor looked at her calmly. 'Why are you so angry? You should be proud of yourself, Bernice.'

`Proud? People died, you arrogant —'

`People died defending their home. People who had put down roots in the first place, who had the courage to belong,

stood before the might of a powerful aggressor and put their lives in danger because they thought this —' the Doctor

spread his arms wide, `-- was worth fighting for.' At no point had his voice raised one octave. 'Haven't you worked it out,

Bernice? You care. You belo 212

ng.'

Bernice hit him.

He fell, got up again, dusted himself down.

`You could have saved them!' she yelled. 'That's what you do! You could have saved them all!' She wanted to yell more, but

it had turned into tears. And the sobs were choking her.

She tried to fend him of one more time as he folded her into his arms, but she failed.

Ì didn't hear about it,' he said, 'until after it was over. And I won't go back in time to stop you from living a real life.'

Ì couldn't save them,' she gasped over and over. 'I couldn't save them...'

They stood in the Garden of Remembrance for a long time, the Doctor rocking the tears out of Benny, holding her

without a word. Until, finally, he whispered, 'Old acquaintance will never be forgot.'

The crimson liquid swilled around the glass in her hand. All around her came the sound of merriment. And she was loving

every minute. The old sod had arranged everything, and of course that annoyingly scrummy husband of hers had been in

on the secret. Just like old times. The only difference was that these days the Doctor's grand machinations resulted in

a series of tres e tables, a turkey the size of an ostrich, a nutroast the size of a turkey, and w at seemed to be gallons of a

very cheeky, thousand-year-old merlot. A grand vintage he had said, much like himself.

Everyone was here. Bev and the still blushing physics student were fighting over the contents of a cracker. Miss Jones

was snoring softly, slouched in her chair and Yakkle was tucking into a rather revolting looking bloodpie. Jason Kane,

meanwhile, was grinning like a prize idiot at her while simultaneously feeding hay to the spectacularly shaggy reindeer that

had pulled the sleigh the Doctor had laid on to transport her to this wonderful surprise party. Only Jason could literally

be was seeing a man about a reindeer when he said he was seeing a man about a reindeer.

And there was the Doctor, sitting to her right, bouncing a now very awake Peter up and down on his knee and

wincing with mock pain as her son grabbed his tumbling locks. The ancient and wise time traveller entertaining her

infant with a song about a rocking robin.

This was family. This was home. This was Christmas.

However, despite her cheer, she couldn't help but notice the empty chair beside the Doctor. In every happy family, it

appeared, someone was always missing.

The heavy wooden door opened on regularly oiled hinges, and immaculately polished shoes strode over the plush, blue

carpet.

Irving Braxiatel dropped some keys down on an ornate Huldran table and sighed. His back arched as he stretched,

trying to ease the ache from his spine. Perhaps this old body was getting a bit... no, that wouldn't happen for another

century or seven. He was just tired.

It was a shame to miss the party but recent events had meant he had been a tad overworked. Never mind, he would

make it up to them by throwing the biggest New Year's Eve party the Collection had ever known. Yes, they would indeed

party like it was 3999.

Either way, he deserved a drink. It was a special day after... the Time Lord glanced at the clock that ticked in the

corner of the room. Ah, yes, four minutes past midnight. It was officially Christmas Turning to the drinks

decanter he stopped short, a look of surprise and then puzzlement crossing his face.

Someone had been in his rooms. Impossible. No one could get past the barriers, not unless he were there. But, sure

enough, his vintage Prydonian was missing. At least this thief in the night had good taste.

Brax turned to walk to his desk, intending to alert security, but he stopped with a quizzical smile. Sitting on a silver tray

on his desk was his decanter of Prydonian, next to a full glass of the amber liquid. Set to one side of the tray was a small,

brightly wrapped parcel and a card.

Cautiously he lifted up the package and rattled it against his ear. It felt harmless enough. Squashy. Slowly he prised

away the tape with his thumbnail and the parcel fell open to reveal a pair of garish socks. Brax dangled them at eyelevel and

his eyebrow shot upwards at the sight of the Father Christmas urging him to 'Press Here'. Obeying the instruction, Brax

was rewarded with a tinny and tuneless rendition of Santa Claus is Coming to Town that proceeded to play.

Grinning in spite of himself, he tossed the socks onto the table and grabbed the card, ripping it open with the bronze

paperknife that rested nearby.

Òh, great heavens,' he exclaimed, taken back by the sheer lack of taste displayed on the front of the card. A badly

painted steam train whistled down the side of snow-capped mountain, watched by a solitary robin. How

delightfully... tacky.

Giving the scene one last look, he flipped open the card to take in the greeting inside.

Ìrving',

Season's Greetings

Love,

Theta *xxx*

Brax plucked the glass of deep amber liquid from his desk and raised it in silent toast, before taking a long, luxurious

sip.

Sometime in the next day or two he would visit Bernice, bring presents for Peter, and seek for a few moments to be part

of a family once more. And when he did he was going to wear the socks.

The Feast of Seven... Eight (and Nine)

Vanessa Bishop

One firmly grasped his coat lapels:

Ì'll give the barstools "jingle bells"!'

The carol singers would persist,

Some out of tune, one sounded pissed,

They weren't, it seemed, just childish pests

But, ruefully, his dinner guests,

The prospect of it turned him numb —

Playing host to Doctors Yet to Come,

But, not to look a Scroogy git,

He opened the door, was sprayed with spit,

The source of his saliva bath

Three, lisping 'Good King Wenthethlath.'

He waved away their Christmas cheer,

`Yes, yes, come in — now, who's brought beer?'

Then eyed the multi-coloured rabble,

Two had Twister, Seven had Scrabble,

Six had Twiglets, crisps and dates,

Mixed nuts, mince pies and After Eights,

Five had bottled water — 'Bore!

You can't get drunk on that!' roared Four,

The First was nodding: `Hmmm...quite right!'

`What's Christmas for, ay? Getting tight!'

Ìt's sparkling, though,' the Fifth began.

`You're not, you're flat.' Four popped a can.

The Eighth had brought some mistletoe,

And aimed for Seven, to Seven's woe:

Àh! No! Rrurevolting! Ace! D'you mind?

Try Six, he's more that way inclined.'

`That way inclined? Inclined? What, me?

I burst with masculinity!

215

Those berries look nice, though — can I just...'

`No.' Just a nibble?"Well, if you must.'

`You've had this place redecorated,

Mmm, don't like it,' Two debated,

`No, too glitzy, too much shine,

Too sparkly."Dear, dear, must you whine?

It's Christmas! That's what tinsel does!'

`Well, now this looks like Omega's!'

The First was feeling quite irate —

A day of this to contemplate!

Christmas tree was on an angle,

Fairy lights were in a tangle,

Lunch had been a nightmare chore —

The turkey had refused to thaw,

He had no patience with cuisine:

Ì wish I'd kept that food machine!'

Thankfully, though, his turkey dinner

With `chesterton stuffing' was a winner,

Two the only one who frowned,

The sprouts Too hard, too green, too round!'

More praise came for the second course —

Of 'Christmas prodding and brenda sauce',

Five called to light the pud this year —

'You're good at starting fires, I hear?'

The dancing flames sent Eight insane:

`Yes! I remember! Pudding Lane!' He planted Five with juicy smackers, Two and Seven pulled on crackers,

`Knock-knock' jokes were falling flat: `Doctor.' Doctor who? Who's that?' When even Six, with stomach ache,

Had waved away the Christmas cake, The Fifth, who hadn't indigestion, Left the room, with the suggestion:

Ì'll wash up and clean the stove' —The air had turned his celery mauve.

They'd all retired for forty winks,

Except the Second, little minx,

Who'd just whipped his recorder out,

To badly play them carols, no doubt,

So Four, as he began to play,

Switched on the festive matinee,

Which drowned the squeaky pipe refrain

With 'If I only had a brain.'

`They wanted me for Oz,' sighed Three,

`What as? The Scarecrow? Dorothy?

You do exaggerate! What a whopper!'

`Thcruffbag!"Fibber!"Tramp!"Name-dropperr

Five, so as to keep the peace,

Changed channels, but it didn't cease,

Ì s'ppose *The* Sound of Music, too,

217

Was lesser for not casting you?'

Ì knew Puccini once,' sighed Eight,

`He had the softest lips.' That's great,

But stay away from me, you sissy,'

Four looked cautious, Eight looked kissy.

Three o'clock, the Queen appeared,

The Third, all patriotic, cheered,

But Eight, lips puckered, mistletoe handy,

Went for the clown and got the dandy.

Tried again to get the clown,

But got a slap, so settled down.

As Christmas Day turned into night,

A game of Scrabble caused a fight,

The Third had Seven's head in a lock:

`There aren't ten "R"s in "Ragnarok"!'

Two'd complained of salmonella,

Four was blitzed, knocked out on Stella,

Six, stuffed full from several courses,

Crashed to Only *Fools* and Horses,

Couldn't even contemplate

Five's offer of an After Eight:

À waffer thin mint? Go on,' he tried,

`Spack off— he's full!' Four clarified.

One took a hanky, mopped his head,

Then hinted it was 'Time for bed',

Switched *Morecambe and Wise* off (seen that show),

And confiscated mistletoe.

Wished he'd gone to Susan's now,

Instead of here, with all this row,

He knew, though, he would persevere,

With nine for Christmas lunch next year...

UNIT Christmas Parties:

Ships That Pass

Karen Dunn

The instrument panel was damaged beyond repair and there were just minutes left before he would crash.

A lucky shot by the hated enemy had disabled the ship's navigation lattice and sent him spiralling, out of control, towards

the surface of this unknown planet.

Acrid smoke filled the wooden cockpit, choking him, and he dragged a bark-clad fist across his streaming eyes to clear

his vision. His head pounded, the scream of the plasma engines invading his skull as they tried and failed to do his

bidding.

As the dying ship burst through a blanket of cloud, he felt a fist of anger clamp round his throat. He had failed. Just two

months in the field and already Brac, newest addition to the legendary Twelfth Coalition of the Voddod, would be listed

as a casualty of war. The dishonour bore a bitter hole of resentment into his second algae stomach as he watched the

ground hurtle towards him.

He noted with satisfaction that his crippled ship would destroy a sprawling building nestled in the countryside below.

219

220

But that brief pleasure was swamped by the outrage that he would never again fight alongside his glorious

lightmates at the front.

A cascade of sparks from the instrument panel left him patting at the embryonic flames that flickered there,

smothering them before they could take hold. The ship juddered, buffeted by its free fall to the surface, and his eyes

wandered to the ejector bole.

A warrior would never eject. The bole was a temptation, there to be resisted so that a dying Voddod could take his

honour to the forests of the dead intact.

Two months. It was pathetic. He would be laughed from the forests. His hand hovered over the bole. Two months! No

honour, no glory. Shot down midway through his first real battle. It was not enough. He had wars to win, battles to fight,

heroic deeds to fulfil in the name of the Voddod Conjunction.

He glared through the cockpit window in defiance. The doomed building might not survive to see another dawn but he,

Brac of the Twelfth Coalition, would live to fight another day.

He slammed his hand down on the ejector bole as the ship smashed into the building.

*** * ***

Taking the medical officer job with UNIT had seemed a good idea at the time, and the adventures Harry Sullivan had

stumbled through since signing on the dotted line had more than made up for the pitiful pay. Despite the morbid

warnings the powers that be had trundled out during his induction, Harry had never believed the job would be the death

of him. Until now.

The pain in his head told him he was alive but that was as far as his luck went. It was pitch dark. His legs were trapped

by something solid and the air was heavy with dust. He blinked rapidly, trying to clear his streaming eyes, but couldn't see a

thing.

The last thing he remembered was a green balloon bouncing off his nose and Sarah Jane Smith pinching the last

sausage roll from his plate as they celebrated the festive season at the UNIT Christmas party.

Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart had been holding court in the centre of the room, telling some barrack room joke or

other; his deadpan delivery bemusing his captive audience, all too wary of their career prospects to excuse themselves.

The Doctor had pulled up a stool and was sitting at the buffet table with a large glass of ginger ale before him,

systematically plucking cheese and pineapple squares from toothpicks and stacking them carefully in separate piles.

Harry had assumed it was a Time Lord thing and left him to it.

Sergeant Benton had joined him and Sarah by the main window; a feathered party hat perched on his head while he

balanced a plate of"sandwiches and a glass of fizzy pop in his large hands.

All in all the party had the makings of the usual, uneventful Christmas military knees-up with the only expectation of

excitement being that, by the end of the evening, the Doctor would have done something surreal with the cheese and

pineapple chunks.

When a young private interrupted the Brigadier in mid-flow to report a UFO, Harry had thought nothing of it. This

was UNIT HQ after all.

`Civilian craft?' the Brigadier had asked.

Whatever the man said in response Harry hadn't heard, but when every soldier in the room headed for the door at

the double with the Brigadier barking orders from the front, he placed his plate on the table with a concerned

frown.

Before he could follow, the Doctor had grinned at him and slid from his stool, flicking his extensive scarf over one

shoulder, his eyes bright beneath that mop of curly brown hair. 'Have a sandwich, Harry,' he had said. 'What's a UFO

between friends? If I know the army, it's probably a lot of fuss over nothing.'

And he then ambled out of the room.

So it came as something of a surprise to Harry when, seconds later, the room exploded bringing the roof down on him

and Sarah.

Choking as he drew in a deep breath, Harry felt the weight on his legs move

and heard a groan. Reaching into the darkness he touched something soft and Sarah's scream added pain to his already

throbbing head.

Ìt's all right, old th221

ing,' he soothed. 'It's only me.'

`Harry? I can't see a thing.'

Sarah's voice was small and Harry awkwardly patted what he hoped was her shoulder. 'Neither can I. Are you hurt? Try to

flex your arms and legs.'

He heard her do so for a moment, then: 'Considering the building fell on us, I'm fine. You?'

`Head's a bit sore.'

He heard her shifting again, carefully. Then a knocking, knuckles on a hard surface. 'I think we're under the buffet

table.'

Harry gave the table a cautious push, dislodging a stream of dust into their upturned faces. He spluttered. 'Let's hope it

holds.' He realised that he didn't sound very reassuring, and changed his tone. 'Never mind, eh? With a bit of luck we'll

be home in time for turkey and mince pies.'

The world was still spinning when the Brigadier was hauled to his feet. He blinked into the fuzzy darkness as someone

brushed him down and set his cap on his head. He could hear someone speaking through the buzzing in his ears but

couldn't make out what they were saying.

Concentrating on the face looming before him he frowned as the toothy, wild-haired vision that was the Doctor

gradually swam into focus.

Behind the Time Lord, Benton was helping his men to their feet while ordering a casualty count and organising a

rescue team in his best parade-ground bellow.

Behind him lay the remains of the west wing of UNIT HQ the dark green hull of some sort of ancient vessel imbedded

deep into the ruins, its wooden interior torn open and littered with chunks of rubble.

With a steadying hand, the Doctor regarded the Brigadier with owlish eyes. `Brigadier,' he intoned, 'order your men to

stand down.'

Lethbridge-Stewart tugged the hem of his blazer into shape and shook off the Doctor's hand. 'Don't be preposterous,

Doctor, we have people down there.'

The Doctor's voice was ice. 'I know that, I know! But that is a Voddod warship. I would rather you didn't start digging

until we know it's safe.'

The Brigadier met his gaze for a moment, and realised yet again that the body language of certainty that he'd got so

used to had changed. He wasn't so sure of this Doctor. So a leap of faith had to be made.

He turned away from the Time Lord and sought out his faithful ADC. `Benton! Stand down!' He turned back to the

Doctor and sighed. 'What was it I once said about not relying on an alien spaceship turning up at these bashes?'

`That was almost exactly it.' The Doctor leapt past the confused sergeant

and picked his way sure-footed across the rubble. 'Rather more exciting than last year's pantomime, wouldn't you say?'

Puffing slightly, the Brigadier clambered over the debris and frowned as the Time Lord examined the exposed wooden

control surfaces of the wrecked ship. 'Doctor, is it a good idea for you to start fiddling with this thing? You might blow us

all to high heaven!'

The Doctor waved him away with an irritated scowl and returned to his tinkering, prising open a panel to reveal an

array of what looked like creepers and vines. 'Oh, dear.'

`What?'

Ìt's genetically coded to respond only to its pilot.'

`Meaning?'

Ìf I start fiddling with this thing it will blow us all to high heaven.' The Brigadier gave him a look. `So what do

we do?'

The Doctor stood up. 'We need the pilot.'

`Who I imagine was vapourised during the crash.'

The Doctor tapped the remains of the control panel, where one red light was blinking. 'He ejected. He's probably in

the woods. I imagine you frightened him.'

`Frightened him?' Scrambling back across the rubble, the Brigadier glared at the Time Lord. 'I swear, Doctor, one of

these days... Benton!'

`This has to be just about the worst Christmas ever.'

222

223

Sarah's voice was rasping, her mouth as dry as parchment as she breathed in the dust-laden air.

Ì don't know. I've had worse.'

She almost laughed, the effort making her cough. 'Harry, you've had a worse Christmas than this?'

Harry's voice was solemn. 'Every year my mother used to make us stay at the table until we had finished our sprouts.

And she wasn't a woman who approved of gravy.'

Òh, how terrible for you! But I can beat that. When I was nine the boy next door, the little rotter, stole my tape recorder

and threw it down a manhole.' `What a brat.'

`But what's worse is I got sent to my room with no Christmas

dinner for punching him on the nose and kidnapping his

Action Man.'

`There is no justice in the world.'

`Don't I know it!'

They laughed quietly together, then Sarah whispered, 'Harry... It's... getting difficult to breathe.'

Harry squeezed her hand. 'Take shallow breaths. It's just the dust. I can feel air coming from somewhere.'

`Downwards. Must be a vent. Too small to get out through.'

`But it means we don't need to conserve our air.'

`Great. That's a big help.' Sarah lay in silence for a while, trying to make out shapes in the impenetrable gloom. The air

was thick and her head was beginning to spin. 'Harry? I don't want to die here.'

`You're not going to die. The Doctor and the Brigadier are working on a rescue as we speak.'

`How do we know?' She could hear the whine in her voice and detested it. `How do we know the whole building hasn't

come down? How do we know they're not lying somewhere waiting for us to rescue them?'

Harry's voice was steady. 'I don't, old thing. But I'd rather wait for the cavalry to come riding round the corner than

wait to die.'

Sarah gripped his hand tighten She was determined to be less scared than he was, and he was beating her by a mile at

the moment. 'Your turn then. What was your worst Christmas ever?'

`When I was twelve my best friend got a racing bike for Christmas. He was riding it over to my house when he was hit by

a car. I spent New Year's Day at his funeral. I suppose that was pretty bleak.'

Òh, God, Harry.'

`Do I win?'

`Chatting away about death while buried underground.' She found herself laughing. 'I think I preferred the sprouts.'

Tracking the Voddod through the woods proved easy for the UNIT troops, guided by the Doctor. Though he made

enough remarks about needles in haystacks, the course of the creature was clearly marked through its heavy, round

footprints and the devastation it had caused by forcing its way through gaps in the trees.

He found himself walking beside a young private who was visibly shaking, his eyes darting around the bushes.

'Leonard,' the Doctor began, casually using the soldier's first name. 'Leonard, I'm sure heavy breathing isn't

mentioned in the stealth handbook and if you get much closer to me you'll step on my scarf.'

The soldier took a step back. 'Sorry, sir.'

The Doctor's voice was low. 'Is this your first mission?'

`Yes, sir. I finished basic two months ago.'

`Do you enjoy the thought of killing anything at Christmas, Leonard?'

`Yes, sir.' The boy corrected himself as he caught the Doctor's angry look. `No, sir. Excuse me, sir —'

`Good answer, Leonard, good answer!' The Doctor pulled a crumpled paper bag from his pocket and absently examined

the contents while continuing to stride along.

With a gasp, Young snapped up his rifle and dropped into a fighting crouch, barring the Doctor's way.

Àh,' said the Doctor casually. Ìf you shoot me I imagine Alistair will be quite put out.'

The soldier's eyes were wide, his voice a hiss. 'Behind you.'

The Doctor turned casually and saw that the whole patrol had their weapons aimed at a figure that had just strode into

view in the middle of a nearby clearing.

It was indeed a Voddod. A very young Voddod, if he was any judge. Its dark red bark armour was tarnished and torn, a

gash on its shapeless brown lump of a head the only injury from the crash. It held its still rather small spearbranch

at the ready and was glaring at the soldiers, a growl rumbling in its throat.

The Doctor stepped forward, proffering the paper bag. 'Hello! Would you like a jelly baby?'

The Voddod didn't move, its eyes darting to and fro, taking in the UNIT troops as they encircled it. It was concluding

that there was no escape.

The soldiers were concluding that they had the upper hand.

The Doctor called out over the violence that in a moment would have erupted between them. 'What's your name'

The Voddod straightened its shoulders. 'Brae, warrior of the Twelfth Coalition.'

Òh! Brac! Yes! I think I know your auntie! Tell me, why are you here?' Brac scowled. 'The enemy.'

Òh, dear. Shot down?' said the Doctor, munching on a jelly baby. Èmbarrassing for one so recently out of the

potting shed.'

`You dare...'

The Doctor stepped closer. 'Yes, yes! I dare! Time Lords aren't known for their nosiness but I do like to be different.'

Hope visibly jolted through the Voddod. 'Time Lord? You have a time craft?' Òh, it's small but it's perfectly formed.

And such a good basis for negotiation.'

Suspicion forced Brac back a step and a dozen rifles were cocked. Flustered, he turned back to the Doctor. 'What do you

want of me?'

The Doctor wandered casually into the space between the Voddod and the soldiers. 'You crashed in a rather inconvenient

place. My friends are trapped beneath your ship. I need you to disable it so we can move the rubble and rescue them and

I'm sure you see how that goes, and I need you to do that now, Brac!'

`Casualties of war.'

The Doctor pulled the TARDIS key chain from his coat and dangled it in front of him. 'A return to the battle.'

The Voddod glared at the surrounding soldiers. 'I could have battle here!'

The Doctor flicked his scarf over his shoulder and tucked the key back into

his pocket. 'Brac, this is Christmas Day! You should see what this lot do at this

time of year to yule logs. The glorious death isn't so bad, it's the autopsy that follows, all those nights in the fridge,

slowly being whittled down, slowly giving up all your secrets. Do we understand each other, Brac? Or do I smell custard?

Eh?'

The air vent must have got clogged up.

Breathing was painful now and the grating rasp struggling from

Sarah's lungs told Harry that neither of them had

long left.

He reached out once more and took her limp hand; squeezing it gently and feeling her fingers hug his in return.

`Happy Christmas, Sarah.'

She swallowed painfully. Happy Christmas, Harry. Hey, it's been fun.'

Who was it that had said suffocating was a lot like falling asleep? He couldn't remember, but they were right. He was

becoming light-headed while his eyelids were heavy and desperate to close.

Sarah's hand fell limply from his and he blinked away tears as his vision began to blur.

Not long now.

When he saw the pinprick of light above him he felt an irrational wave of annoyance wash over him. How dare death be so

corny? If he heard a voice telling him to move into the light there would be hell to pay.

The light grew bigger, almost blinding him, and a fresh cascade of dust and rubble made him cough. Then something

blocked the light and he heard Sarah gasp, 'Doctor?'

He blinked furiously; his eyes flooded with tears, and finally made out the face of the Time Lord grinning down at them.

`Hello, Harry. Hello, Sarah,' he said, as casually as if they had met on the street. 'There's pie and ice cream if you'd like

some.'

And then strong hands were pulling them gently from their erstwhile tomb into the welcome glare of searchlights

beneath a sky heavy with stars. Standing amid the rubble, Harry watched as the Doctor pulled Sarah into a rib-

crushing hug before allowing a medic to fuss over her with a first-aid kit. She was led to a waiting ambulance where she

curled up on a stretcher with a shuddering sigh.

Someone guided him across the debris to the ambulance and held a beaker of water to his lips. He drank deeply, the

liquid soothing his screaming throat.

Which was when the Doctor tapped him on the shoulder and said, 'Harry, I think you should know, someone crashed the

party.'

Harry turned around and saw the Voddod.

And that was when Harry Sullivan finally fainted.

Evergreen

Stephen Cole

— 'Tis a difficult time for her, Christmas, I know. But really. She will have no decorations in the house, no festive food, no

trimmings... Honestly, not so much as a pudding to wish on. She'll give no gifts and refuse any offered.

T'aint Christian. I know she's grieving, but t'aint Christian.

She's done up the church right nice this year, but if goodwill's not in her heart...

— I hope the Reverend be watching her come Candlemas, that's all. 'Tis a miracle none of us be lying in the sod after

what she done.

`What did you do, Connie?' John asked her in the cottage that night, after the pork was salted and hanging in the byre.

'What happened at Candlemas?'

Connie pursed her lips as she ladled his soup into the bowl. 'Tongues wagging in the village, are they?'

He nodded. 'In the butcher's, at any rate. I heard Mrs Bledlow talking to Mrs Gould.'

She sniffed. 'Some say the Bledlows rig their scales. But mark you, you'll always get a full portion of tongue from her.'

John chuckled and left it at that. But now Connie felt uncharitable.

`Still,' she added, 'Mr Bledlow never gives me less money than's due for the meat. Maybe a little more these last months.'

`He's a good man,' John agreed, and drained his tankard of beer. He set it down on the table with a thump and tore off

some bread from yesterday's loaf. Connie eyed him, absorbed now in his meal, dunking his bread and pressing it all into

his mouth like a child showing off. And yet still he had about him the serious look of a composer or a sculptor, with the

high brow and the piercing blue eyes and the curls of chestnut hair. And goodness knew he was a man of learning. Her

Charles had never so much as looked at a book, yet John devoured them with the same delight as he tor into his evening

meal each night.

The cottage had seemed so empty, so cold and dark since Candlemas. And she with it; mindless at first of the trees

through the window as they regained their leaves and sprightly colour, then knowing and bitter as they burnt off their

coats in crisp reds and browns to stand stick-like again. But John could fill the cottage with a satisfied belch, or a noisy

yawn or a few puffs of hard breath from the long climb up the hill.

He'd approached her at October's end, a simple traveller looking for lodgings in return for labour. She'd agreed,

knowing full well she'd let things

go to pot around here. Charles had always worked so hard, and yet made so little. Now all she'd got was the

smallholding. She'd spent whole days sometimes watching his animals wasting and the yard filling with muck.

Watching it happen and selfishly wishing Charles had taken as long to die.

That night, John fed the fire then perched on the rickety armchair with a handsome bound book. Connie sat in

Charles's rocker and watched him turn the pages. He would read to her some nights, which she enjoyed, not knowing the

look of words herself.

`What is it tonight?' she asked him.

The Interpretation of Dreams by Sigmund Freud,' he murmured.

Ìs it an exciting story?' she asked. 'It's taken your attention.'

Ìt's not a novel,' he told her gently, and she blushed. 'He's a scientist. He believes our dreams betray our

preoccupations and our problems. That through study they may shed light on our natures.'

`Whoever heard of such a thing!' Connie snorted. 'Are the dream books not enough to go by? Any child can tell you what a

dream means.'

John looked at her with interest. 'Can they?'

Àye, and with solemn eyes and heart, they'll tell you 'tis the very truth.' She cast her mind back to the maxims she'd

been told as a child. 'To weep in a dream betokens bliss. To kiss the dead betokens a life to live. And should you dream of

spoiled eggs it is sign of ill fortune.' She forced a brief laugh. 'But

it is all just fancies. In truth there's no rhyme or reason

to dreams or life alike as far as I can see.'

John looked into the flames that shimmered in the grate. 'I dream each night, Mrs Bryde, of such things... Some

marvellous and wonderful and some so terrible that when I wake I lay rocking myself for hours with no comfort.'

They listened together to the crackle and hiss of the fire.

Ì don't believe I dream at all,' she told him.

She heard the wagging of tongues herself the next day, in the bakers. The hot smell of freshly baked bread, smothering

the hateful Christmas spice in the cold air, had lured her across the snowy, slippery street into a trap.

I hear Connie's Christmas pudding broke open as she unwrapped it. That'll be what done it.

Mrs Bledlow, she holds how Connie cut a mince pie and so cut her luck.

It was both, I reckon. Small wonder she brought down her poor husband. And then she does her darndest to bring

down the whole lot of us.

They look up as the bell above the door jangles, but Connie's gone already, bustling back up the hill, her basket empty and

her cheeks scarlet.

She sits and broods in her kitchen, watching John's coming and goings in the

yard and the byre. He tramples muck and straw into the snow. The cold keeps

back the smell of the animals, takes all comfort from the air. Only the scent of the spruces in the woods carries to her.

She wonders if he will ask again what happened at Candlemas. A part of her dreads it, yet hopes that he shall.

He stays silent all night, though, save to praise her cooking. He sees there's no bread. But makes no comment. He talks

of the fresh snow falling like it's an adventure.

And that night, Connie dreams of Meg Bledlow screaming and crying behind her counter, hiding from something

that wants her dead. She sees young, smooth hands reaching into her hollering mouth and tugging out her tongue. Meg

falls silent and her eyes close. Then Connie is looking in the old silver mirror above the butcher's counter, and she is a young

girl. She pops the tongue in her mouth and swallows it daintily. She stares happily at herself in the glass for a long, long

time. She can hear the steady seconds ticked off by the clock in her bedroom.

The sound prods her into wakefulness and the cold grey morning. She feels puzzled at the images, and hopes they will flee

her head swiftly. But the dream lingers and pricks her like holly. She feels sour and sinful, and mean-minded.

At breakfast she notices John's book and wonders if the meaning of her dream is hidden there in the print. But he has

gone out early so she cannot ask him.

He returns at lunchtime, serious-looking, and instinctively she feels afraid. `Mrs Bledlow is dead,' he says. 'Tom found her

in the coal shed, first thing. Uncanny, they're saying. Not a mark upon her, and never sick a day in her life.'

The whole village turned out to attend Meg Bledlow's funeral. Connie knew she must go herself despite the throng, and

John accompanied her. As she'd expected, few welcomed her there. She hovered at the back of the crowd, noting the

look of lilies and chrysanthemums with a disapproving eye. In times past, the villagers would always come to her to do

the flowers. She remembered the festoon she'd made for Charles.

It was not the flowers she remembered but her hands,

working them, sorting them like mechanical things. Moved by her will, not her heart.

Charles had been blind by the end in any case. Her labours wasted, like the weeks spent attending his decline.

Connie thought of her wreaths and garlands attending the church inside. As the service droned on she had sweated

and felt itchy before them, and was glad now to be out in the cold white daylight.

She watched them lower the coffin into the black gash in the snow; a wooden tongue slipping into the cold mouth of

earth, and felt guilty and ashamed. Tears pricked her eyes, but she knew they were for herself, not Meg Bledlow.

229

Mrs Gould was casting hard looks in her direction, whispering to her neighbour. She could imagine their words: The

nerve of the woman. Look at her standing with *her* man friend, bold as brass. She killed Meg Bledlow, you know, surely as if she slit her throat. What she 230

done pleased the Evil *One* and let him in. The neighbour was nodding. Connie stared down at her feet,

dabbing at her eyes. Maybe you're right, she thought. Maybe I did.

She thought of Meg Bledlow's tongue, fat and wet and snaking as she chewed it in her sleep. To suffer annoyance from a

snake betokens sight of an enemy, the dream-scryers said. And in truth, she saw no friends about her in the churchyard;

save the Reverend perhaps, and John beside her.

Òne funeral makes three,' Mrs Gould said loudly. 'Now death's come the once, he will again, and soon.'

John twisted some ivy from the overhanging tree near the crest

of the hill. He showed it to her, but she wanted only to be

home now, with time and space to gather her thoughts.

Ì'll not have the likes of that in my house,' Connie snapped.

Ìt's Christmas in a week,' John protested. 'The cottage could use some cheering up. You could.'

`There's the byre to litter if you're feeling so idle, John,' she told him sharply.

He dropped the ivy. 'Life's too short to spend it sadly, Mrs Bryde.'

Ì wish it were a good deal shorter!' she shouted. 'Short as a child's Christmas, I'd have it.' She stormed away

towards the cottage, but slipped in the snow and fell on her behind. She floundered, struggling to rise, willing herself not

to weep. John's arms slipped awkwardly under hers to help her up. She accepted his help in silence, then pulled away and

continued up the path to the cottage.

Ì don't believe what they say in the village,' John called after her.

'I should hope not,' she snapped, panting for breath, her rump aching. `Superstitious fools, they are. See wickedness in

everything about them.'

John's smile was not quite cold enough to seem mocking. 'Some even see it in a branch of evergreen.'

She pushed open the door ready to storm in, but hesitated on the front step. The little hallway greeted her, bare and

cheerless, stoic as the little heat it harboured fled out of the door.

Ì'll make us a brew,' she muttered. 'You get the fire started.'

Ìt's a simple enough story,' she said. But she'd never put it into words before, and it took some thinking about.

John waited patiently, blowing on his scalding tea.

`Charles fell ill last Christmas. Headaches, first, terrible headaches. Then his sight went, and his mind not far

behind it.' Again she paused. John

nodded slowly; understanding, encouraging. 'He fell ill the day I dressed the church for Christmastide. Been doing that

for the Reverend since I was a little girl. For any special occasion, but especially Christmastide.

Èveryone keeps such a merrie old Christmas these days. It's all so fashionable, isn't it, changing the traditions.

Folk in town they don't know whether to take down the decorations on twelfth night, New Year's Day, Old Christmas Day...

nor whether they should burn or bless the old wood once it's gone. But here in the village we have them down by Candlemas

Day as we've always done.'

`February the second,' John observed, and sipped his tea.

`Charles took a fever midway through January.' She watched a wrinkled skin form over her tea. 'He was in a terrible state.

He grew mad. Word spread he'd been taken by devils. I tended him. By then, he couldn't do a thing by himself.'

John nodded thoughtfully. 'Did you have no help?'

`Some came from the village. They urged me to open the doors so Charles's soul could fly free at the proper time. To

turn the mirrors to the wall in case his likeness in death should be caught there. And I had their prayers of course.'

She paused, scowled. 'But as Candlemas Eve neared, these good souls fretted and worried. First they begged, then

they commanded I tear down the Christmas decorations, for still they lined the church hall. But Charles was so bad by

then...'

He was looking at her blankly.

`Do they have no such superstitions where you've travelled, John? 'Tis unlucky to keep Christmas holly about the

house after Candlemas Day, as the Evil One will then come himself and pull it down.'

Òne might imagine he had better things to do,' John murmured.

`Happen the good Lord did, right enough, than listening to village prayers and the pleas and witterings of a stupid old

woman.'

`You're neither,' said John firmly. He drained his tea in a giant gulp. 'What was stopping the villagers taking down the

decorations themselves?'

`He who puts them up must take them down,' said Connie. 'That's what the folk round here believe. If every scrap of

Christmas decoration is not removed from church before Candlemas Day, there will be a death within a year in the family

who takes the pew where a leaf or berry is left.'

John snorted. 'Nonsense.'

`Like scrying dreams?' Connie asked him pointedly. 'Look at Meg Bledlow. You said yourself they don't know how she

died, so hale a woman.'

Ìt wasn't from sitting on a berry,' John countered.

`Weren't one berry nor a single leaf I left behind in that church on Candlemas Eve,' said Connie fiercely. 'Though

none shall believe me now. Nay, and though they watched me pull it down, too. Charles lay bad that night, his head full of

frets and nightmares. And that godly lot of honest souls, they came calling and half-dragged me out of here to get the job

done down at the

church. Mrs Gould sat with Charles so I would go.' She could feel her throat tightening, hastened to speak her story before the

sobs could rise up. 'Such a commotion... That mithering lot, sorrying for the trouble they'd put me to but pointing to the

dangers while I ripped down the rosemary and the mistletoe, half blinded with tears. Sweeping the filthy floor as

midnight sounded from the church clock. And the fuss and the urging to be done ere the chimes stopped! I screamed at

them for quiet, I'd done it near enough...'

John said nothing, just watched her from the rickety chair and nodded. She took comfort from the solidity of him. A

short wash of tears streaked over her face, and her throat burned, but it was not the fit she'd feared would grip her.

'We all of us left the church in a foul temper. And when I got back, the windows and doors were all flung open and

batting in the wind. The mirrors were turned.' She blew her nose. 'I'd missed him go.'

They sat listening to the clock ticking.

Ànd now you won't keep Christmas?' asked John.

Ì've tried to find goodwill in my heart,' she whispered. The Reverend asked me to decorate the church again this year,

though folk warned him against it. And I did, though I took no joy in doing so. But I'll not dress my house again. Not for

me nor for you.'

`Christmas is a time to look back on the past fondly.' He paused. 'I travel, Mrs Bryde, because I cannot remember

where my true home might be. Some years ago now... my memory fled me.'

Connie looked at him in surprise. 'Is it so?'

`When I look to the past I see only blackness. And I can feel... some great dread upon me. Some memories are forever

lost, even if I recover, I can feel it. So I travel to make new memories. It's our memories that warm us, when the world

about us grows so cold, don't you think?' He smiled unexpectedly. `Perhaps I might hang a garland or two in the cow

shed?'

`Happen you may,' she said grudgingly. She gave him a brief, self-conscious smile. 'You and the animals can keep a merrie

old Christmas in there together, just so you promise to leave me out of it.'

She came to regret the words, for leave her out he did.

When the girl was found by Tom Bledlow the next day, naked in the snow at the fringe of the forest, John happened to be

close by gathering firewood. He helped Bledlow carry her back, covering her with his coat of scruffy velvet.

They feared her dead or dying at first, but she soon revived in Bledlow's front room, the fire and the smell of good

meat bringing the colour back to her white cheeks. She said she remembered not a thing; not her name nor where she

came from. The snow was freshly fallen, and had covered her tracks; there was no way of telling which path she'd

tramped. But all agreed she'd not have got far as naked as a babe in arms.

Bledlow sent off friends to ride out and ask around despite the blizzard.

Some said that he took his finding the girl as a sign from Meg that she was hereabouts, somehow, and not done with him

yet.

The girl was not beautiful by all accounts, but some said she had a beguiling air. And she had charmed John, it seemed.

Connie guessed that when he looked in the girl's clouded eyes he was seeing something of himself.

232

He went to see the girl again the next day. He was off to Bledlow's anyway first thing, with the yuletide bacon and hams,

but he needn't have stopped there. He had no call to.

Still he remained talking with the girl till after noon. Connie broke up the icy cattle water in the trough herself, with the

pick. It reddened her hands but calmed her spirit. The chore was John's, and when he saw it done without his stir he

would know she was not pleased.

But he made no comment. When he returned, he simply bound up his sticks and vines and placed them round the byre.

Even hung a garland in the hayloft for his chucks.

The girl's run from something, Mrs Bryde,' he told Connie at dinner that evening, with the air of a man keen to get

something off his chest. 'From some great evil, she believes.'

Òh, yes?' Connie raised an eyebrow. 'What might that be?'

`She can't recall, though she's trying.'

`Fancy,' she sniffed. 'Then how does she know she's run from evil? Evil may have sent her here.'

`You wouldn't think so to look at her,' said John. 'Most think she's had a lucky escape.'

`Well, Tom Bledlow's taken her in. He's a good man, and people side with him. She's landed on her feet if you ask me.'

He seemed pensive. 'The village is filled with talk of devils watching from the woods.'

`So soon after Meg Bledlow was taken in her sleep I'm not surprised,' said Connie. 'We're simple folk round these parts,

John. Not what you're used to, I shouldn't wonder.'

Òne can't help but wonder,' mused John forlornly.

She knew he would go to see the girl again the next day.

She had no call to go to Tom Bledlow's that morning but still she went. She took him a basket of eggs and some ripe

cheese; told herself that with him wanting for a wife at Christmas he could perhaps use the cheer.

She bustled into his shop, pushing through the queue. Heads turned and noses twitched to see her there.

Ì've brought you something, Tom Bledlow,' she called to him. 'It's for now, not for Christmas, so don't be saving it. I'll

pop it in the pantry for you, and don't be thinking of putting it on your counter, neither. I'll not have you selling goods

you've not paid for!'

Tom looked peaky but his bushy moustaches still twitched with a smile for her. 'You'll not buy better rates from me,

Connie Bryde,' he told her. 'But I thank you for the thought. While you're out back, take your John by the ear and put

him to better use than wearing out a resting maid. I'd hold back a farthing for his day's labour, an' all.'

The queue writhed as the ladies tossed looks to each other, the tidbit travelling like food through a snake.

Connie pursed her lips and went through.

The moment she saw the girl, she knew her to be a bad lot. Her berry-brown eyes held a child's boldness but there was

something old in her too; there should've been lines harrowing the high forehead, spots of liverish brown on the dimpled

cheeks and hands.

She knew at once that this was the snake. Her enemy.

`Mrs Bryde,' John greeted her agreeably, though with an air of some bafflement. 'What brings you here?'

She looked crossly at the floor. 'An errand to run.'

`What a stink!' the girl cried suddenly. Her thin lips pouted. 'Cheese, I trust?' Ànd what else might it be?' snapped

Connie.

The girl seemed quite amused. 'I'm sorry. I simply have no taste for it.'

She risked a look at John. 'Good cheese is like good wine, they say. 'Tis age

that brings out the full strength and flavour, takes more to the table.'

Ì suppose it's good that as milk curdles it stays agreeable,' said the girl, her

eyes twinkling. Tor those who have an appetite for such things.'

Connie crossed through to the pantry and set down her basket. She could

hear John's low voice, and a stifled gasp of scandal from the girl. `But the whole world speaks ill of her!'

The unkind words set Connie's cheeks to crimson. She'd been right from the first. This girl had never run from evil;

she may have shown evil her back, but only so it might hop on and be carried.

Connie bustled back through to the sitting room. 'John, the bad weather's keeping up so you must gather in the sheep

today.'

`Just as you say, Mrs Bryde,' said John, rising from the chair.

`Silly creatures, they don't manage well in the snow,' she announced, as if to justify her command. 'Three winters back

we had two in a ditch, fleeces so sodden they couldn't even stand for the weight of them.'

`Did they die?' asked the girl, wide-eyed.

Connie glanced at her. 'One did.'

Às you say, Mrs Bryde,' said the girl, cheeks dimpling and teeth sharp in her smile. 'Sheep are such silly creatures.'

He stays in his room all the evening. Connie sits alone in the kitchen. Sound

carries. She listens to the scurry of his fingers rustling through pages, and

books slamming shut like little doors. Perhaps he prefers their company to

hers after her sharp words this morning. Or is he simply finding a poem to read to the girl, or a passage that has

amused him, or the meaning of a certain dream he wishes to share with her?

For she knows there is something of an understanding between them. Word has spread through the villages. No one

knows the girl. No one has lost her or posted for her return. Were she a few years younger, she would be called a

foundling. But Connie suspects the men have other words for her.

Connie shivers. She caught the hard look in those berry-brown eyes, and feels the girl means to harm her.

`Have I been so wicked, Lord?' she wonders aloud, and then starts. She has not spoken to Him since Charles was taken

from her.

The thought gives her strange cheer. She knows she will hear no answer to her question, but finds she has chosen to

listen regardless.

It is Christmas Eve tomorrow.

The rustling of John's fingers through the books goes on, but it is like rain on the windowpane, or the thin wind calling

through the winter trees: part of the background of things and you don't really hear it.

But John's not dismissed so lightly.

She's not sure when in the night he comes to her, but he tells her to meet him in the woods. The girl is outside. She is

moving between the cattle, drinking the animals' blood. When she finishes with them she will come inside the house to

feed. He touches her face with one cold hand. He tells her to be ready in an hour. Ready for what? He departs.

She dresses, a hard nut of worry budding in her belly. Then she is out of the house, the front way. She thinks she can hear

stealthy sounds coming from the byre. She has had a lucky escape.

She knows just where to go in the dark. John's tracks mark the thick snow,

and she can catch them by moonlight. She follows them into the heart of the

forest, even when they grow smaller, like the tracks of an animal.

And she emerges from the blackness and the protection of jostling trees

into a clearing. The light is better here, the moonlit snow seems to glow. A hand touches on her shoulder. Another

clamps around her mouth. All her sense crashes back into her head but she knows it to be too late.

Waking. Cold and set shivering, falling through a black, sharp world. She felt no hope, but still clutched at the air for a

means to stop her falling

Her hands met John's upon her. He gathered her into him, and soothed her, murmuring into her ear like a mother to her

babe as her numb th 235

oughts pieced together a truth.

The girl lay dead in the snow. There was no blood nor mark, but she was dead all the same, Connie could tell. And,

lying under a tree, was Tom Bledlow in a striped nightgown and cap, frost riming his moustaches.

236

Òne funeral brings three,' she whispered.

`No,' said John. 'It's over now.'

Tom was breathing, slow and sure as ever he had.

`There will be others coming from the village,' John said, 'summoned in their sleep to witness. She wanted to make

you seem responsible for Tom's death, and for mine. A scapegoat for her feeding.'

Connie pulled away from him, dizzy with fear. 'Feeding?'

`She took health and succour from the living. Big gulps at first, after a dry time alone. Poor Meg Bledlow fed her well.

But she needed more. She'd started on Tom when I got here.'

`He's not dead?'

Ìn a short time he would've been. And I was to follow him. Then, you would be found standing over our bodies.'

`The village folk, you say,' she murmured, shivering a little now in the cold. `Summoned in their sleep?'

He nodded patiently. 'As she could take from the body, so she could give to the mind.' She felt he was choosing his

words carefully so she might understand them, but was too dazed and scared to feel slighted. 'Place pictures there,

images to deceive. You're not well-liked, Connie, you don't court favour. They'd blame your actions on jealousy. They'd

call you a witch. Sharp tongues are allies for creatures like her.'

Connie understood. 'And with your deaths she would be sated?'

`No. She would stay here and go on feeding, quietly, living off others. Slowly drain all life from this place, then shrug

off the husk and travel somewhere new. She has done so before.'

`How do you know such things?' breathed Connie. 'Your books? Or... Or is this what you talked of when you sat with

her for so long?'

Ì sensed something of her nature and wished to find out more, to be sure I was right,' John murmured. 'But in truth,

Connie, she was familiar to me from the first. She belongs to the worlds I dream of each night.'

`Then... does your mind sicken, John?' She glanced down at the girl in the snow all hunched and coiled, who bore scant

likeness now to the bright creature she had been. 'You poor man, to know such horrors, to walk in your sleep through

shades and devilment —'

`The girl is no shade. She's just from somewhere far away.' He smiled at her sadly. Now, I must leave here.'

`What?'

Ì killed the girl.'

`To save a man!'

`There will be scandal and questions and gossip... a horrible hubbub.'

`So, what of it? What of you?' She placed a numb hand on his

arm. 'Stay, and tell the village what you have told me. Tom

Bledlow will speak for you, surely? These folk will believe you as I do.'

'I really don't care if they do or do not,' he said gently. He seemed at peace as he said it. 'You belong here. I don't. Still,

I'll take some fond memories with me.'

Às will I,' she murmured instantly, though in truth she felt numb.

Ànd there's a chance now for you to wipe clean your slate,' John said. 'Open up your doors and windows and let life

back inside.'

`But must you fly? With no home and bad talk against you... You shall be a fugitive!'

He smiled and cupped her cheek. 'That holds no fear for me.'

They heard distant crashes through the thick, brittle undergrowth, noisy footsteps crumping in the snow. John turned

and left without another word.

237

There was a fearful din over the death of the girl. They laid her out in the church and argued over where to bury her, but

she saved them the trouble. Her form crumbled swiftly until nothing was left but a fine black ash. Connie swept the

remains out of the church herself and then burnt the broom.

The Reverend spoke to a hall jammed full that Christmas Eve night.

Tom was in a bad way. Shock they said, not devilment, but he needed some nursing. Connie had agreed to call in on

Christmas Day.

After church, she baked a sausage plait, and as her plump fingers worked the pastry, she listened to the wind and the

rain lashing her glass. Her mind dwelled on the dream she remembered still.

If night-creatures could place dark pictures in the mind, who then had given her sleep the image of the child taking the

tongue of Meg Bledlow?

To kiss *the dead* betokens a life to live, the old dream books said. And here she stood.

She thought on that. The cottage seemed empty and forlorn with John gone, despite the crackling fire, and the salt

smell of sausagemeat.

Connie took a lamp and looked out on the filthy night. She flung open the door and stamped across the puddle-strewn

yard to the byre. The warm stink of huddling animals filled her breath as she raised the lamp and stared around at the

intricate wreaths and festoons John had hung and left behind.

Decorations in a cowshed! Ridiculous!

She snatched them all down, one by one, and then carried them inside to brighten her own rooms.

Epilogue

Paul Cornell

Christmas Eve on *the* Wiltshire Downs. And the moment *comes.* The first bells break out *down* in Cherhill, and then *there are* echoes from Compton Bassett, Calstone, Heddington, and they roll *across the darkness of the* Plain, up from Salisbury, clear as the wind

allows, then scattered *elsewhere.*

All those bells, like stars on the ground.

All *those* people, understanding the moment: as *above, so below.*

Ì look unto the hills, from *whence* cometh my help.'

The snow doesn't often fall at Christmas now. But they still stand for each *other*. Each snowflake is a fractal design, that lasts only

a moment. Each is symmetrical, *a* pattern formed around a point by the wonderful interlacing systems of the clouds and the

oceans and the land. And us, *necessary* to *see* it.

Each snowflake is unique.

Snow can be many bad things, from chilled hands to collapsed roofs to death on the *roads*.

But if it wasn't for the snow, how could *we believe* in *the* immortality of the soul? You turn and walk down into *the valley,*

heading for home.

Document Outline

- 001.pdf
- 002.pdf
- st11pdf.pdf